

THE ROLE OF OFFICER SELECTION AND TRAINING ON THE SUCCESSFUL
FORMATION AND EMPLOYMENT OF U.S. COLORED TROOPS IN THE
AMERICAN CIVIL WAR, 1863-1865

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by

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ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF OFFICER SELECTION AND TRAINING ON THE SUCCESSFUL FORMATION AND EMPLOYMENT OF U.S. COLORED TROOPS IN THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR, 1863-1865, by Daniel V. Van Every, 105 pages.

The successful formation and employment of the USCT regiments during the Civil War depended on many factors. The soldiers themselves were highly motivated to succeed. Victory in the war meant permanent freedom for themselves, and their families. But motivation and courage alone do not make a successful military organization. One of the crucial factors that contributed to the success of the USCT was the highly qualified nature of the majority of white officers selected to lead USCT regiments. Officers were appointed to command USCT regiments following a logical and original merit-based program of selection and promotion. That process surpassed the standards for officers in white regiments. USCT officers were screened for character and dedication. All were required to produce some form of recommendation or nomination from their commanders or leaders of their community. They were vetted by an impartial Board of Examiners that determined their moral character, merit, and competence to lead. Many received additional, valuable education through semi-formal support systems of schooling that armed them with a unique quality education in military art and science.

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ACRONYMS

USCI	United States Colored Infantry
USCT	United States Colored Troops

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The kind of leadership available to an organization is a principal factor in its operation. So far as armies are concerned the quality of leadership determines their success. Indeed it often determines their survival.

—Anonymous, *Selected Quotations, US History Leaders*

Research Methodology

This study examines the role of the white leadership in command of black soldiers and its impact on the establishment of the United States Colored Troops (USCT) as a viable and successful military organization. The study addresses several research questions. How did the various disparate enterprises throughout the departments of the Union Army develop a comprehensive policy for arming free blacks as soldiers? What motivated whites to lead black soldiers? What role did military necessity play in the selection and appointment of USCT officers? How did political relationships between private organizations and the US federal government influence USCT officer selection and training? Did the unique nature of USCT leadership have any enduring effects on USCT veterans? This study will show how the development of a selective system of assessment and selection of white commanders of USCT regiments elevated the military and social standing of blacks by ensuring the success of such a seminal endeavor.

The first chapter will provide the background by describing the Union military situation and the strategic need to use blacks as soldiers. Chapter 2 will examine the four geographical areas of the Union and occupied territories where blacks were first assigned to Union Army regiments. That chapter will also look at the motivations of the

abolitionist movement and how it gained popular support for arming blacks. Also, Chapter 2 will briefly discuss the military leaders of early black regiments, their motivations, and the result of their efforts in creating black units. Chapter 3 will cover the formation of the USCT and the formalization of a federal policy for allowing blacks into the Union Army. Chapter 3 will also discuss the selection and promotion of white officers, the boards established to vet candidates, and some of the civic institutions and policies established to support the process. Chapter 4 will briefly illustrate some examples of the influence of USCT service on both the officers and the soldiers. It will discuss the possible effects of USCT service on the lives of both black and white veterans, what consequence those influences had on the veterans' social and emotional health following the war, and what overall bearing the USCT had on the quality of life for black and white veterans after the war. Chapter 5 will provide conclusions drawn from the research on the USCT. Chapter 5 will summarize the answers to the research questions and provide recommendations for future research and inquiry into the topic of USCT leadership, as well as other topics briefly addressed but worthy of further study.

Background on the Strategic Situation

Considering the size and disposition of the United States Army in the early months of 1861, the federal government was ill prepared to fight even a small scale war, let alone the enormous war of national survival that was to become the American Civil War. The U.S. Army, miniscule by European standards, contained barely 16,000 men in active service. The majority of forces were garrisoned in the Western territories, far from the capitol and easy communications with senior commanders. The Army was concerned primarily with protecting Western settlers and fighting Indians. To make matters worse,

there was a mass exodus of experienced military leadership as a result of the secession of the Southern states. A large number of serving Southern officers abandoned their commissions in the U.S. Army to seek military service with their home states.

Throughout the war, manpower remained a serious concern for the North.¹

This exodus of officers served to exacerbate the challenge of an already limited pool of experienced leadership available to the Union Army. The United States Military Academy at West Point commissioned only a handful of officers per class. The curriculum provided was woefully inadequate at preparing students for the realities of war.² The small size of a standing army, a miniscule officer corps, vast natural borders that provided geographic security, and a lack of any credible military threat to the safety of the nation all contributed to a complete lack of a martial tradition.³

As the Union Army began to recruit regiments at the beginning of the Civil War, the federal and state governments turned to local civic leaders and educated men to fill the void. Federal and state government politicians, lawyers, physicians, businessmen, ministers and other civic leaders were commissioned to lead inexperienced regiments of fresh recruits. These appointed officers were themselves inexperienced in the art and

¹James McPherson, *The Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 313.

²Paul D. Renard, "The Selection and Preparation of White Officers for the Command of Black Troops in the American Civil War: A Study of the 41st and 100th U.S. Colored Infantry" (Ph.D. diss., Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 2006), 69-70.

³John Keegan, *The American Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), 38.

science of war, and were often tactically naïve and overly romantic about the realities of combat.⁴

The vast majority of these appointees commissioned to lead men in battle had never experienced combat. They were men of influence, at the very least within their own communities, and educated. Thus, by merit of their success in their civilian careers, officials believed they would be equally successful in military pursuits.⁵ This was not always the case. This inexperience and military naiveté among the officer corps contributed to the enormous number of casualties and tactical failures early in the war.

Though the Union mobilized only one-third of its available military manpower by the beginning of 1862, the pace of recruitment died down to a trickle. The casualties suffered throughout 1861 and the spring of 1862 were discouraging. On 17 July 1862, Congress empowered the President to call all able bodied men between the ages of eighteen and forty-five into military service. Using this authority, the War Department required the states to provide an additional 300,000 soldiers for nine-month enlistments. Even with the assistance of a federally sponsored \$25.00 bounty to entice enlistees, the state governors were hard pressed to meet their quotas.⁶

Along the entire Union and Confederate border escaped slaves began to filter into Union lines. The number of escaped slaves was greatest where the Union Army

⁴Ibid., 40.

⁵John W. Blassingame, "The Selection of Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers of Negro Troops in the Union Army, 1863-1865," *Negro History Bulletin* 30, no. 1 (January 1967): 8.

⁶McPherson, *Battle Cry*, 491-493.

successfully occupied Confederate territory, such as the West, South Carolina, and Louisiana. Added to the number of escaped slaves were the slaves captured and ~~–emancipated~~” from rebel owners. The Union Army provided compensation for the labor of these former slaves. The Army employed them as unskilled laborers, craftsmen, teamsters, and in other roles within its camps, as well as in the construction of fieldworks and fortifications. The Union military and civilian leadership acknowledged early the military value of the labor provided by newly free blacks in the war. However, the strategic value and necessity of arming blacks was not immediately understood by senior military and political leaders. The shift in national attitudes towards using free blacks as soldiers was gradual.⁷

There were disparate opinions in the North regarding arming blacks. Though Lincoln avoided the issue early on, many prominent abolitionists hoped the Civil War would end slavery forever. They believed using free blacks as soldiers accelerated the process.⁸ Despite abolitionist pressure, senior Union Army leaders discouraged early attempts to recruit and train black regiments. Major General George B. McClellan, commanding the Army of the Potomac, openly forbade such attempts. Despite this, some Union commanders recruited former slaves and organized them into regiments. These attempts were mostly unofficial or carried out by stretching the rules authorizing freed slaves to be ~~–employed~~” by the Union Army, and were made by abolitionist-minded

⁷Daniel Waite Howe, *Civil War Times* (Indianapolis, IN: The Bowen-Merrill Company, 1902), 268-269.

⁸McPherson, *Battle Cry*, 312.

commanders. Eventually the Union government recognized the strategic value of raising regiments of former slaves, and even free black men from the north.⁹

From December 1862 to the spring of 1863, Congress debated the issue of creating black regiments and attempted to pass legislation for their formal employment. Meanwhile, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton and President Abraham Lincoln gave authorization on an *ad hoc* basis to raise black regiments. As a result of this turmoil, recruiting efforts were piece-meal and the military commands and leaders authorized were seemingly chosen at random. No cohesive system was in place.¹⁰ On 22 May 1863, the War Department finally imposed order on the entire process with General Order Number 143. The order created the Bureau of Colored Troops. The Bureau established and regulated the procedures for recruiting, manning, organizing, and selecting leadership for the newly formed United States Colored Troops (USCT).¹¹ This policy answered the question of how to raise black regiments, and authorized active recruitment, but the question of selecting the officers to lead these new regiments was another matter.

Even among many abolitionists, prejudices abounded regarding the ability of blacks to make good soldiers and the challenges of commanding them. The general attitude was that superior officers would be needed to elevate the fighting ability of

⁹Howe, *Civil War Times*, 272.

¹⁰Dudley Taylor Cornish, *The Sable Arm: Negro Troops in the Union Army, 1861-1865* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1987), 98-99.

¹¹U.S. War Department, *General Order (GO) No. 143*, 22 May 1863.

blacks and keep their “savage nature” in check.¹² Politically, the guarantee that only whites would serve as officers of USCT regiments was a salve that enabled the administration to gain support for arming former slaves. By restricting officer positions to whites, the War Department gave the impression that the patronage system of obtaining commissions in white regiments remained the same in the USCT. To the contrary, USCT officer selection criteria were much more restrictive and selective.¹³

For abolitionist supporters the requirement that only whites were eligible to command USCT regiments was seen as a compromise. They believed that prohibiting blacks from holding commissions stymied their initiative and motivation by limiting their potential for advancement. However, abolitionists were reassured that the USCT regiments received the best qualified officers to command due to a rigorous selection process. Many politicians who supported black regiments believed the quality of officers would aid the success of the units and pave the way for black commissioned officers once the idea of black soldiers was fully accepted by the nation.¹⁴

Though prejudice and inequity remained following the Civil War, the consequence of the successful formation and employment of the USCT was that nearly one-fifth of all adult black males of military age (15 to 48) participated in the Civil War as soldiers. This active participation served to help sever the psychological fetters of

¹²Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle: the Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers* (New York: The Free Press Division of MacMillan, Inc., 1990), 35-36.

¹³Ibid., 35.

¹⁴Ibid., 36.

inferiority and changed the legal and civil role of blacks in America forever.¹⁵ Honorable service in the Union Army and substantial assistance to the Union victory reinforced blacks' justifiable moral claim to equal rights as American citizens.¹⁶

The successful formation and employment of the USCT regiments during the Civil War depended on many factors. The soldiers themselves were highly motivated to succeed. Victory in the war meant permanent freedom for themselves and their families. They were eager to affirm their manhood and courage. There are numerous accounts of black soldiers demonstrating personal bravery and valor on the battlefield. But motivation and courage alone do not make a successful military organization. One of the crucial factors that contributed to the success of the USCT was the high quality of white officers selected to lead USCT regiments. Officers were appointed to command USCT regiments following a logical, and original, merit-based program of selection and promotion. That process surpassed the selection standards for officers in white regiments. Those who sought commissions as officers in the USCT were screened for character and dedication. All applicants were required to produce some form of recommendation or nomination from their commanders or leaders of their community. They were vetted by an impartial Board of Examiners that determined their moral character, merit, and competence to lead. Many received additional, valuable education through semi-formal support systems of schooling that armed them with a unique quality education in military art and science. Finally, in order to advance in rank and position within the USCT, white officers had to

¹⁵Eric Foner, "Rights and the Constitution in Black Life During the Civil War and Reconstruction," *The Journal of American History* 74, no. 3 (December 1987): 864.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 865.

pass subsequent boards to demonstrate their merit and potential for higher rank and increased responsibility.

Literature Review

There have been more articles and books written on the American Civil War than on any other era of American history. Some of the better inclusive histories include James McPherson's *Battle Cry of Freedom* and John Keegan's *The American Civil War*. Both provide a solid general history of the Civil War from the perspective of the Union and Confederacy. Donald Stoker's *The Grand Design*, though not a general historical overview, gives a detailed analysis of the greater strategies involved in the Civil War, especially from the Union perspective. Finally, no study of any area of the Civil War would be complete without considering the U.S. War Department's *War of the Rebellion: The Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*.

Regarding the general role of blacks and black soldiers in the Civil War, a great number of primary and secondary sources are available that cover the subject. Some of the more scholarly early sources include William Wells Brown's *The Negro in the American Rebellion* and Joseph T. Wilson's *The Black Phalanx*. These books give a sense of immediacy and rely greatly on reprints of primary sources and numerous direct quotes of participants to illustrate the involvement of black soldiers in the war. The authors' own text seems to provide transition and context as the story unfolds. Both of these books were written shortly after the Civil War, and the audience is expected to already be familiar with the subject matter. In contrast, Benjamin Quarles's *The Negro in the Civil War*, Dudley Taylor Cornish's *The Sable Arm*, and Hondon B. Hargrove's *Black Union Soldiers in the Civil War* provide a much more narrative format. Direct quotes are

used mostly to emphasize key points and there is a greater attempt to place the subject matter in context with current events. All five books, which span from 1880s to 1990, provide a unique view on the evolution in the historiography of blacks in the Civil War.

Some of the more useful compendiums of primary source documents on the role of black soldiers are *Freedom: A Documented History of the Emancipation, 1861-1867, Series II*, edited by Ira Berlin, et. al., and *A Grand Army of Black Men*, edited by Edwin S. Redkey. However, there are hardly any comprehensive works specifically covering the role of white officers in black units. Of those that have been written, one of the most useful is Joseph T. Glatthaar's *Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers*.

Limitations and Delimitations

For this study, unless specifically addressing a unit or organization, or applying a direct quote, the term black will be used in place of African American, Negro, or colored. Though African American is the accepted term for Americans of African descent in 21st century American culture, it is awkward and anachronistic when used in a historical study. Likewise, the terms Negro and colored, though historically acceptable, may be seen by some as offensive or derogatory.

This study narrowly focuses on the role of white officers and their leadership and selection within the USCT. There is no intention to ignore or diminish the role of black officers or enlisted men of the USCT. Many black officers and soldiers demonstrated leadership during their service in the Civil War. However, it is beyond the scope and intent of this study to cover those facts in any more detail than is required to address the primary subject matter.

CHAPTER 2

BLACK UNITS PRIOR TO THE USCT

Public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed. Consequently, he who molds public sentiment goes deeper than he who enacts statutes or pronounces decisions. He makes statutes and decisions possible or impossible to be executed.

— Abraham Lincoln, *Lincoln-Douglas Debates*, 21 August 1858

Abolitionist Motivations

Prior to the Civil War, the abolitionist cause was a complex movement of competing ideologies and interests. These interests developed out of competing motivations, but ultimately culminated in popular support for black soldiers. Prior to 1861, the abolitionist movement was viewed by most Americans as either a fringe political movement or dangerous religious crusade. Even in the North, abolitionist meetings occasionally found hostile audiences and were often interrupted or broken up by pro-slavery or anti-abolitionist conservatives. A general lack of solidarity regarding the motivations of individual members toward emancipation also hindered the movement. The ranks of the abolitionist Anti-Slavery Society were filled with Quaker moralists who desired the freedom of blacks and their elevation to equality. On the other hand, Free Soil and Free Labor advocates supported secession simply to see slavery removed from the Union as a competition to white labor.¹⁷

¹⁷Charles H. Wesley, “The Civil War and the Negro-American,” *The Journal of Negro History* 47, no. 2 (April 1962): 88.

Their perception as a fringe movement notwithstanding, many abolitionists channeled their frustration with the political status quo into political activism. The influence of the Anti-Slavery Society and the abolitionist movement began to increase in the 1840s as members of the fading Whig Party, as well as some Northern Democrats, took up the abolitionist cause out of political expedience. These former Whig and Northern Democrat politicians began to migrate over to the Free Soil and Republican Parties. Though some Whigs and Northern Democrats were abolitionists prior to changing their party support, many aspiring abolitionist leaders (such as Wendell Phillips, Charles Sumner, and Henry Wilson) found their moral compass just as the influence of the Free Soil and Republican Parties began to grow.¹⁸

In the 1850s, the abolitionist movement began to diverge into three unofficial factions. First were those who advocated violent insurrection. Of this group were those, such as John Brown, who actively engaged in violence, and others who added to the controversy through inflammatory rhetoric. The second group, led by men such as William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass, focused more on a moral appeal. Many in this group, such as the Quakers, even leaned toward pacifism. The final group was equally opposed to slavery as the first two, but much more conciliatory toward Southern slave states. This group made efforts to work with slave-holders and southern Democrats to maintain a *détente* with slave states. Their aim was not so much to end slavery but to halt its spread into new territories.¹⁹

¹⁸Betty Fladeland, “Who Were the Abolitionists?” *The Journal of Negro History* 49, no. 2 (April 1964): 108-109.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 100-101.

Regardless of those politicians who used the issue of abolition as a political stepping stone, many of the rank and file within the abolitionist movement and the Anti-Slavery Society were true believers. From the 1850s to the 1860s the numbers of abolitionist supporters steadily grew.²⁰ By the end of 1861, the abolitionist movement began to find even more supporters in military leaders and political leaders who saw the freedom of slaves as a military necessity. This military necessity argument, driven by the exigencies of war, further shaped the abolitionist movement. There were those, such as Charles Sumner, who emphasized the strategic value of abolition over the moral argument of compassion for the individual. By reframing the debate over abolition in this manner, the abolitionist movement gained a great deal of support among the masses. Sumner's position on the military necessity of freeing slaves won over non-abolitionists such as James R. Gilmore and Robert J. Walker (founders of the *Continental Monthly*, a non-abolitionist "emancipation" journal).²¹

The emergence of the military necessity argument for emancipation was perhaps best encapsulated in the new philosophy of "emancipationism." Emancipationism gained some of its earliest and most enthusiastic supporters within the Union Army and among the families of Union soldiers. Emancipationism was a pragmatic philosophy that ignored the moral grounding of the early abolitionist movement and saw the end of slavery as a strategic means to hasten the end of the war.²²

²⁰Ibid., 109.

²¹James McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1964), 90-91.

²²Ibid., 92-93.

Regardless of their motivations, feelings about race, or individual ambitions, the men and women who championed the anti-slavery movement succeeded in bringing the issue of freedom for blacks to the table as a viable tool to aiding the end of the war. They spent decades laying the foundation through the exercise of freedom of speech and the press. Abolitionists were finally able to mobilize the Union population and bring to their side a number of people who were previously apathetic or ambivalent toward slavery.²³ Additionally, they provided a large pool of motivated, talented, and conscientious men who guided former slaves through their transformation to soldiers and citizens.

The Early Movement to Arm Black Soldiers

The process of employing free armed blacks in effective military units developed in three general unplanned and overlapping stages. The first stage started almost at the beginning of the war and included the use of former slaves liberated from secessionist slave-holders, as a labor force for the Union Army, thus increasing the number of white soldiers available to fight. The second stage was a deliberate effort made on the part of general officers in the field to arm former slaves and make them an asset to the Union Army, not just as a labor force, but as members of combat units. The final stage occurred with the Emancipation Proclamation. The proclamation served as a tool which weakened the psychological bonds slaves to their status and provided an incentive to seek refuge in Union Territory.²⁴

²³Fladeland, "Who Were the Abolitionists?", 114.

²⁴Howe, *Civil War Times*, 269-270.

Even as the first states seceded from the Union, there were a number of black leaders and white abolitionist politicians who made preparations to form black units and begin recruiting as soon the Civil War began. However, in the minds of many Union whites the notion of employing armed blacks was an insult to the fighting ability of white soldiers. This sentiment dominated public opinion during the first half of 1861. As a practical matter, many military and political leaders feared arming blacks would serve as a wedge to drive the border slave states over to the Confederacy.²⁵

Aided by the pressure of abolitionist leaders, the realities of military necessity soon took root in the general population. By the end of 1861 there was a growing acceptance of the inevitability of emancipation and its use as a tool in ending the war. Abolitionists exploited this sentiment to grow their numbers and worked to influence Lincoln and Congress to consider arming blacks.²⁶

By the beginning of 1862, Congress and President Lincoln were experienced considerable pressure from lobbyists to take a stand on the status of former slaves that were either “liberated” by Union soldiers or who had freed themselves and made their way to Union lines. General officers were beginning to take matters into their own hands and issuing general orders regarding the freed slaves within their departments. In the summer of 1862, Congress finally passed a confiscation act that provided an official status for former slaves confiscated by Union soldiers. Congress further modified this act in July with the Militia Act of 1862. This act authorized the enlistment and employment

²⁵Christopher Dorsey, *A Call to Arms: The Realities of Military Service for African Americans During the Civil War* (Palm Coast, FL: Backintyme, 2007), 24.

²⁶James McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality*, 81-82.

of blacks as laborers, cooks, and teamsters for the Union Army. It did not, however, authorize blacks to serve as soldiers. This legislation helped increase the pool of available manpower to the Army and demonstrated the military value of employing free blacks. In January 1863, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton formally authorized the employment of blacks as soldiers. This authorization, on the heels of the Emancipation Proclamation of 1 January 1863, gave immediate legitimacy to efforts across the Union, and in occupied Confederate territories to recruit and train black regiments.²⁷

Although the ~~authorization~~ to raise black regiments up until that time ranged from unofficial sanction to willful misinterpretations of existing orders and policy, the speed with which black units were employed following Secretary Stanton's order reflected the efforts of many ambitious and forward thinking leaders across the military departments. In September 1862, Major General Benjamin Butler had coopted regiments of free Louisiana blacks which had comprised the Louisiana Native Guards (now dubbed the Corps d'Afrique), and requested permission to raise more regiments of black men. At Fort Scott, Kansas, Senator James H. Lane established the 1st Kansas Infantry (Colored). The 1st Kansas, composed mostly of former slaves from Missouri, was officially mustered into service in January 1863. From May to August 1862, Brigadier General Rufus Saxton revived a program begun by his predecessor, Major General David Hunter, and recruited, armed, and trained regiments of former slaves at Port Hudson, South Carolina. In Massachusetts, Governor John A. Andrew initiated his plan to muster two

²⁷Leodis T. Jennings, ~~The Strategic Importance of Colored soldiers in the Civil War~~ (U.S. Army War College, Strategic Research Project Paper, 2002), 3

regiments of free blacks. The first recruits for the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment arrived at Camp Meigs, Massachusetts in February 1863.²⁸

James H. Lane, and the First Black Kansas Regiments

Prior to the Civil War, Kansas had a reputation as being a radically anti-slavery state. The atrocities committed by John Brown in the 1850s, and the violent means Kansas “Jayhawkers” used to keep Kansas a free state during the bush war, known as “Bleeding Kansas,” helped spread that reputation. In fact, most Kansans did not consider themselves abolitionists.²⁹

James H. Lane, a Kansas Senator at the beginning of the Civil War, saw things a little differently than his constituents. Lane was a die-hard abolitionist and “Jayhawker” who had supported John Brown in his fight to keep Kansas a free state. A prominent political figure in both the abolitionist and Free-Soil movements, Lane also carried credentials as a military man. He was a veteran of the Mexican-American War and a former colonel in the Indiana militia.³⁰ Lane led a contingent of radical abolitionists comprised of journalists, ministers, and politicians. He used the Free Soil movement and anti-slavery sentiment to advance his radicalism while promoting his political career.³¹

²⁸Howe, *Civil War Times*, 271.

²⁹Albert Castel, “Civil War Kansas and the Negro,” *The Journal of Negro History* 51, no. 2 (April 1966): 125.

³⁰Hondon B. Hargrove, *Black Union Soldiers in the Civil War* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 1988), 52.

³¹Castle, “Civil War Kansas,” 127.

Shortly after the beginning of the Civil War, Lane formed a regiment of anti-slavery Jayhawkers known as “The Kansas Brigade.” Though Missouri was still loyal to the Union, the Kansas Brigade made several raids into Missouri and freed slaves from pro-secessionist slave holders. Under the authority of Major General John C. Fremont’s “emancipation order”³² (later countermanded by President Lincoln)³³ freeing the slaves of secessionists in Missouri and other territories under his authority, Lane and other veteran Jayhawkers, such as Charles R. Jennison and James Montgomery, raided Missouri from Kansas. These Jayhawkers transported hundreds of freed slaves across the border into Kansas.³⁴ Lane integrated the former slaves into the local Kansas labor force. Their labor alleviated the shortage of white laborers caused by enlistments. Lane’s political enemies criticized him for these actions. He was even accused of accepting money from land-owners and businessmen based on how many contraband slaves he brought into Kansas from Missouri.³⁵

Throughout the end of 1861 and the beginning of 1862, the mood in Kansas shifted from a begrudging acceptance of former slaves as a valued labor force to enlisting them as soldiers. Although this movement was supported and even prompted by abolitionists, the reason for acceptance among Kansans was utilitarian and

³²See Appendix A for an excerpt of Fremont’s order.

³³Fremont’s refusal to rescind his proclamation voluntarily is one of the reasons he was relieved and his command, the Department of the West, was divided into the Departments of New Mexico, Missouri, and Kansas in November 1861.

³⁴Castle, “Civil War Kansas,” 127.

³⁵Ibid., 129.

emancipationist in nature: the use of black soldiers would disrupt the morale of the Confederacy. Also, the wounds of “Bleeding Kansas” were still raw, slavery was seen as its proximate cause, and any blow that could be struck at those who had caused so much misery was welcomed. Finally, Lane made a persuasive argument through an editorial campaign in the *Leavenworth Conservative*, that blacks were needed to defend the long Kansas frontier.³⁶

Lane’s reputation as a frontier fighter convinced Lincoln to give him permission to recruit two additional regiments. To help in his duties, Lincoln appointed Lane as Major General of Volunteers. Though Lane he had a reputation as a “rough-and-tumble” politician and a disrupting influence, Lincoln believed his military value and reputation as a man who got things done outweighed any potential risk in trusting him with such an important duty.³⁷

Lane threw himself into the recruitment of both white and black regiments. He manned recruiting stations under his authority with abolitionist recruiting officers and repeatedly made clear his intention of raising at least two black regiments. Secretary of War Edwin Stanton rebuffed his attempts to recruit blacks, but Lane never reduced his efforts. His responses to Stanton’s rebuffs were to feign misunderstanding, deliberately misinterpret the Secretary’s warnings, or simply ignore his directions.³⁸

³⁶Ibid., 131.

³⁷Hargrove, *Black Union Soldiers*, 53.

³⁸Ibid., 55-57.

In August 1862, Lincoln appointed Lane commissioner for recruiting in the Department of Kansas. He was more successful than Lincoln had hoped and raised one black and three white regiments. With Lincoln's unofficial verbal permission, Lane stretched the powers and authority of the Confiscation Act of 1861 to justify the enlistment of the black regiment. It took Lane four months of waging a propaganda campaign in Kansas newspapers to gain acceptance among the Kansas populace for a black regiment. Due to fear of violence and white resentment, the regiment drilled and trained in secret. The secretive nature added to the difficulty of recruiting black men to enlist.³⁹

The black regiment recruited by Lane became the 1st Kansas Volunteer Infantry (Colored). Lane appointed Captain James Williams as colonel and commander of the regiment. Colonel Williams set the standard for the leadership required to build a successful regiment from the ground up. He organized the regiment into six companies and instituted daily drills, parades, instruction in marksmanship, and physical conditioning. His dedication and training paid off in October 1862 when five companies from the regiment drove off an element of rebel guerillas and later defeated a numerically superior Confederate force at Island Mounds, Missouri. The regiment won this engagement before receiving pay or official recognition as a legitimate unit of the Union Army.⁴⁰

³⁹Castle, "Civil War Kansas," 132.

⁴⁰Hargrove, *Black Union Soldiers*, 58.

The selection of quality men to serve as officers was important to Lane. He followed up his success in selecting officers for the 1st Kansas by appointing Colonel Samuel J. Crawford, later governor of Kansas, as commander of the next black regiment, the 2nd Kansas Volunteer Infantry (Colored). Colonel Crawford proved just as effective and dedicated as Williams. He considered the training and leadership of a black regiment to be considerably more challenging than that of a white regiment, but trained his regiment just as rigidly and thoroughly as Colonel Williams had trained the 1st Kansas. The washout rate was high among the white officers, especially among the officers who were political appointees. Most chose to resign. Colonel Crawford let them go. He found candidates for commissioning from the best non-commissioned officers recommended by the commanders of the nearby white regiments. He selected only sixty men. Colonel Crawford drove his officers hard and insisted that they ~~make~~ good in drill discipline, and military appearance, or hand in their resignations.”⁴¹ These men became the corps of his regiment’s officers and foreshadowed the eventual requirement that only the most competent and committed men be selected for command of black units during the Civil War.⁴²

Rivalry of Ambitions and Colonel James Montgomery

A man of ambition himself, Lane seemed to attract men of equal ambition. Colonel Charles R. Jennison and Colonel James Montgomery were such men. Jennison

⁴¹Dudley T. Cornish, *Kansas Negro Regiments in the Civil War* (Topeka, KS: Kansas Commission on Civil Rights, 1969), 12.

⁴²*Ibid.*; Hargrove, *Black Union Soldiers*, 59.

and Montgomery were both veterans of “Bleeding Kansas” and experienced guerilla fighters. Montgomery had served directly under John Brown in the 1850s.⁴³ Both Jennison and Montgomery saw commanding the new brigade of black soldiers as a stepping stone to commission as a brigadier general. Whether he was threatened by their ambitions or saw more promise in other men, Lane gave neither man a regimental command of black troops. In an attempt to appease Jennison’s ego, Lane made him chief of recruiting. Motivated by revenge, Jennison and another Jayhawker, George Hoyt, lead raided the camp of the newly formed 1st Kansas (Colored) with a group of loyal men, causing 200 recruits to desert.⁴⁴

Rather than stay in Kansas and contend against both Lane and Jennison in a feud he was likely to lose, Montgomery appealed to his political and financial contacts in Washington, D.C.⁴⁵ Montgomery’s abolitionism was outshone only by his ambition. He politicked for a command in South Carolina under Major General David Hunter, commander Department of the South. In January 1863, he was sent to South Carolina to raise a regiment of black volunteer infantry and serve under General Rufus Saxton. His regiment became the 2nd South Carolina Volunteer Infantry (Colored).⁴⁶

⁴³Castle, “Civil War Kansas,” 127.

⁴⁴Ibid., 133.

⁴⁵Ibid., 126.

⁴⁶Cornish, *The Sable Arm*, 104-105.

1st and 2nd South Carolina Volunteers
and the Department of the South

In the spring of 1862, the War Department transferred Hunter to the Department of the South, a newly created department consisting of the areas occupied by the Union along the Atlantic Coast of South Carolina, Georgia, and northern Florida. Hunter found the Department of the South in a similar strategic situation to the Department of Kansas: an extremely large border to defend, limited white manpower, and a raw source of manpower in freed slaves. To facilitate his efforts at raising black regiments, in April 1862 Hunter issued his own General Order Number 11 (similar to General Fremont's) which declared ~~persons~~ of color lately held to involuntary service by enemies of the United States . . . are hereby confiscated and declared free."⁴⁷ Just as Fremont's proclamation was rebuffed by Lincoln, so was Hunter's. Undaunted, Hunter quickly requested permission to organize units of freed slaves for the purpose of performing combat duties.⁴⁸ He also immediately took steps within his department to find officers who could properly command his new black units. In May 1862, Hunter advised Brigadier General Isaac Stevens, commander at Port Royal, South Carolina, ~~I~~ have concluded to enlist two regiments to be officered from the most intelligent and energetic of our non-commissioned officers; men who will go into it with all their hearts."⁴⁹

⁴⁷Noah Andre Trudeau, *Like Men of War: Black Troops in the Civil War, 1862-1865* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1998), 14-15.

⁴⁸United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: Official records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series 3: vol 2 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1880-1902), 29.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 30.

Hunter's proclamation and efforts to create regiments of freed slaves was supported by Northern abolitionist politicians such as Governor John A. Andrew of Massachusetts.⁵⁰ However, the War Department was indifferent in supporting his newly formed "South Carolina Volunteers." Lack of logistical support, administrative mismanagement, and Hunter's draconian methods of impressing new recruits (many slaves were simply dragged from their plantations with no knowledge of their intended use as soldiers), conspired from the beginning to bring Hunter's efforts at recruiting a free black regiment to failure. Likewise, though he sought to officer his regiments with the men of quality, there was no means of selection to ensure that such men were selected. Without pay, arms, or decent leadership, and on the heels of a Congressional investigation looking into the unorthodox methods of raising the regiment, Hunter disbanded the "1st South Carolina Volunteers (Colored)" on 10 August 1862.⁵¹

General Saxton

The irony of Hunter's aborted attempt at raising a regiment of former slaves in South Carolina lay in the permission given his subordinate, Brigadier General Rufus Saxton. On 25 August 1862, Secretary of War Stanton, in direct opposition to President Lincoln's stated policy, wrote Saxton with orders granting him full authority to carry out the exact same recruitment of black regiments that had eluded Major General Hunter. Stanton wrote:

⁵⁰Ibid., 45.

⁵¹Trudeau, *Like Men of War*, 16; *Official Records*, 3:2, 152-153, 196, 346.

In view of the small force under your command and the inability of the government at the present time to increase it, in order to guard the plantations and settlements occupied by the United States from invasion and protect the inhabitation thereof from captivity and murder by the enemy, you are also authorized to arm, uniform, equip, and receive into the service of the United States such number of volunteers of African descent as you may deem expedient, not exceeding 5,000, and may detail officers to instruct them in military drill, discipline, and duty, and to command them. The persons so received into service and their officers to be entitled to and receive the same pay and rations as are allowed by law to volunteers in the service.⁵²

Stanton gave Saxton direct responsibility for the protection and welfare of the plantations and inhabitants in the Department of the South. His authority included broad latitude to carry out his duties, answerable only to the commander of the Department of the South.⁵³

Why Saxton was given the authority denied Hunter was a matter of political timing and preferences in personality. Hunter's preemptive emancipation proclamation was a political time bomb that the administration needed to defuse. Stanton viewed Saxton as more professional and likeable. A regular army officer and West Point graduate, Saxton gained the confidence of whites and blacks alike. Though not an abolitionist himself, Saxton may have been influenced by his father, himself a devoted abolitionist.⁵⁴

Saxton immediately went to work building the new 1st South Carolina Volunteers from the remnants of the old. His greatest concern was finding the best men to command

⁵²Hargrove, *Black Union Soldiers*, 45; *Official Records*, 1:14, 378.

⁵³*Official Records*, 3:2, 153.

⁵⁴Cornish, *The Sable Arm*, 80-81.

the new regiment. As regimental commander, Saxton decided on a Harvard intellectual and minister, Thomas Wentworth Higginson.⁵⁵

Colonel Higginson and the 1st South Carolina Volunteers

Colonel Higginson went about training and organizing the 1st South Carolina in a most methodical fashion. Though predisposed to racial stereotypes regarding blacks, Higginson was a devoted abolitionist. He also made a determined effort to look past his own stereotypes and prove that his men were as able as white soldiers. Higginson championed the cause of enlisting blacks into the Union Army in numerous articles he wrote from the field for *Harper's Weekly* magazine. He also used every opportunity to impress on his officers that they were transforming former slaves into soldiers and free men. Slaves followed out of fear and compulsion. Higginson intended to develop soldiers with commitment. Higginson wanted his men to follow commands because it was their duty, and not out of fear or servility. He encouraged the men to act with discipline and military bearing at all times, because it was his belief that military discipline and service in the name of liberty would give them the self-respect slavery had stolen. With their dignity restored, his men could take their place as free-men and citizens of the Republic.⁵⁶

⁵⁵Stephen V. Ash, *Firebrand of Liberty: The Story of Two Black Regiments that Changed the Course of the Civil War* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2008), 34-35.

⁵⁶Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reid, and Leslie S. Rowland, eds., *Freedom: A Documented History of Emancipation, 1861-1867, Series II: The Black Military Experience* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 57-60, 518.

Colonel Montgomery and the 2nd South Carolina Volunteers

Colonel James Montgomery took command of the 2nd South Carolina Volunteers in January 1863. In contrast to Higginson, an intellectual and cerebral leader, Montgomery was an ambitious firebrand. He learned warfare as a bushwhacker and guerrilla fighter in Kansas, both before the Civil War under John Brown and again in 1861 under Lane. He continued to practice this form of warfare as commander of the 2nd South Carolina, such as well he ordered the destruction of Darien, Georgia, solely to do maximum damage to the morale and property of Confederate civilians. He said to Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, who was serving under him as a subordinate regimental commander, ~~“We~~ “We are outlawed, and not bound by the rules of regular warfare.”⁵⁷ General Hunter politely but firmly attempted to put Montgomery’s predilection for unconditional warfare in check in a letter sent on 9 June 1863 which stated:

the destruction of crops in the ground, which may not be fit for use until the rebellion is over, or which may when ripe be of service to the forces of our Government occupying the enemy’s country, you will not engage in without mature consideration. This right of war, though unquestionable in certain extreme cases, is not to be lightly used, and if wantonly used might fall under that part of the instructions which prohibits devastation. All household furniture, libraries, churches, and hospitals you will of course spare.⁵⁸

Ironically, Hunter’s letter was dated the same day Montgomery destroyed Darien.

Montgomery also differed from Higginson in his attitudes about race. While both men were ardent abolitionists, they each fostered racial prejudices and stereotypes

⁵⁷Russell Duncan, ed., *Blue-Eyed Child of Fortune: The Civil War Letters of Robert Gould Shaw* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1992), 343.

⁵⁸*Official Records*, 1:13, 467.

regarding blacks. However, while Higginson attempted to overcome his prejudices through reason and experience, Montgomery demonstrated attitudes toward his men that bordered on outright racism. As anti-slavery as he was, Montgomery demonstrated his true feelings about blacks in a speech to the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, where he harangued the regiment for refusing to accept \$7.00 per month for their pay (while white soldiers received \$13.00 per month). In a letter dated 3 October 1863, Private George E. Stephens documented Colonel Montgomery's speech and his attitude toward black soldiers.⁵⁹ Montgomery stated,

I should be glad to make you as good(sic) soldier as the white. You are a race of slaves. A few years ago your fathers worshipped snakes and crocodiles in Africa. Your features partake of a beastly character. Your religious exercises in this camp are a mixture of barbarism and Christianity. I am disgusted with the mean, low habits you have learned from the low whites. . . . Education expands the brain and improves the features. Your features can be improved. Your beauty cannot recommend you. Your yellow faces are evidences of rascality. You should get rid of this bad blood. My advice to you is the lightest of you must marry the blackest woman.⁶⁰

Montgomery's words infuriated both the men and officers of the 54th Massachusetts. When reports of his speech reached abolitionist leaders such as Frederick Douglass, his actions were highly criticized and negatively affected his reputation. Stephens stated in the same letter, very presciently, that "Col. Montgomery unfortunately has been accustomed to the negro as a slave or freedman. It startles and astonishes him to see him

⁵⁹Donald Yacovone, ed., *A Voice of Thunder: The Civil War Letters of George E. Stephens* (Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, 1997), 275-284.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 278-279.

stand erect with intelligence beaming in his countenance. He perhaps never saw a negro approach a white man except with hat in hand and bowed head.”⁶¹

New Orleans and the Louisiana Native Guards

The Louisiana Native Guards have the distinction of being the only Confederate militia regiment manned and officered entirely by free blacks. Recruited and organized in New Orleans in 1861, the Louisiana Native Guards was an attempt by the free black gentry class of New Orleans to show their loyalty to their city, state, and the Confederacy through military service. The regiment was mustered into the Louisiana Militia on 2 May 1862. The Louisiana Native Guards’ formation was cited by Louisiana papers and politicians to demonstrate the loyalty of Confederate blacks. In actuality, free blacks joined for a variety of personal reasons. Not least of these was the long tradition of free black membership in the Louisiana militia dating back to 1727, when Louisiana was still a French colony.⁶²

The Native Guards was short lived and barely had time to prove itself as a military unit defending New Orleans. On 29 April 1862, New Orleans surrendered to Union forces. The Native Guards was disbanded, the men ordered to hide their weapons and uniforms.⁶³ However, the new Union military governor of New Orleans and

⁶¹Ibid., 281.

⁶²James G. Hollandsworth, Jr., *The Louisiana Native Guards: The Black Military Experience During the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 1-4.

⁶³Ibid., 10-11.

commander of the Department of the Gulf, Major General Benjamin F. Butler, would soon find a purposeful use for a regiment of trained, educated, and armed black soldiers.

General Butler and the Corps d'Afrique

A very influential and successful member of the Democratic Party in the North, Butler was a political appointee with no military experience prior to the Civil War. Recognizing Butler as a potential political rival, in the spring of 1861 President Lincoln coopted Butler's loyalty temporarily by appointing him Major General of Volunteers. This was a shrewd political move and allowed Lincoln to appear non-partisan and gain support among Northern Democrats.⁶⁴

Butler was the first Union general to declare escaped slaves "contrabands of war." His policy of refusing to return escaped slaves to bondage won him the affection of many Republicans and animosity of the Confederacy. It also motivated many abolitionists to cite his example as proof of the value of emancipation as a legitimate military object toward ending the war.⁶⁵

Although Butler was a mediocre tactical leader at best, he recognized the strategic value of otherwise untried military practices. Lampooned and derided in Southern newspapers, Butler was an innovative administrator, progressive military theorist, and imaginative strategist. He was, for example, the first American commander to

⁶⁴Robert S. Holzman, "Ben Butler in the Civil War," *The New England Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (September 1957): 331-332.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, 332.

successfully use observation balloons and pioneered experimentation with the Gatling gun. For Butler, the strategic value of black regiments was almost immediately obvious.⁶⁶

As military governor of New Orleans and commander of the Department of the Gulf, Butler faced a manpower dilemma. He had only 2,500 troops under his command within the city. New Orleans alone had a population of 168,000 residents. Fully accustomed to unorthodox yet pragmatic methods, Butler devised a plan to solve his manpower shortage. Despite the Union administration's objections, Butler quickly accepted into service the former members of the Louisiana Native Guards.⁶⁷ With these black soldiers as the nucleus, Butler quickly began to organize the Corps d'Afrique. President Lincoln reassigned Butler in December 1862 and placed Major General Nathaniel P. Banks in his place.⁶⁸ Thus, Butler was not present to see the administration fully endorse his program by assigning Daniel Ullmann as commander of the Corps d'Afrique and as the first Brigadier General of Volunteers to command black troops.

Ullmann Goes to New Orleans

The responsibility of commanding the first brigade of black soldiers as a general officer came unexpectedly to a New York politician, lawyer, and Union officer, Daniel Ullmann. Ullmann called on President Lincoln in October 1862 during convalescence

⁶⁶Ibid., 332, 337-338, 343.

⁶⁷Ibid., 334, 338.

⁶⁸Benjamin F. Butler, *Private and Official Correspondence of Gen. Benjamin F. Butler During the Period of the Civil War*, vol. 3 (Norwood, MA: The Plimpton Press, 1917), 547.

following his release from a Confederate prisoner of war camp.⁶⁹ During the course of their conversation, he urged Lincoln to adopt a formal policy of arming free blacks.

While Ullmann was laying out a detailed argument for his reasoning, Lincoln interrupted with the question “Ullmann, would you be willing to command black soldiers?”⁷⁰

Ullmann admitted that if given a choice, he would prefer not to command blacks, but he conceded that he was a soldier and he would do his duty if called.

Soon after the Emancipation Proclamation in January 1863, Ullmann was ordered to New Orleans to recruit and train four regiments of free black men and promoted to Brigadier General. He immediately received entreaties from friends and associates to desist and resign rather than taint his reputation as a commander of black soldiers. He initially found difficulty in finding qualified white men willing to command black soldiers. However, with the full support Secretary Stanton, Ullman soon recruited two hundred officers. The majority of his officer recruits were veterans with two years of campaign experience. Ullmann’s only qualifiers were that they were earnest, educated, and gentlemen.⁷¹

Ullmann’s commission as a brigadier general and his mandate to raise black regiments in Louisiana represented the first federally directed effort to employ blacks as

⁶⁹Daniel Ullmann, *Address by Daniel Ullman, LL.D., before the Soldier's and Sailor's Union of the State of New York, on the Organization of Colored troops and the Regeneration of the South, delivered at Albany, February 5, 1868* (Washington: Printed at the Great Publishing Office, 1868), 1.

⁷⁰Ibid., 2.

⁷¹Ibid., 2-3.

soldiers.⁷² Although there was still no formal policy in place, Lincoln's decision to send Ullman to New Orleans, coupled with the Emancipation Proclamation, steeled the resolve of the Federal government to mobilize resources for the full recruitment of black soldiers.⁷³ Recruiting and training the first brigade of free southern blacks in Louisiana set the conditions for northern abolitionist politicians to begin the recruitment of free blacks in the North.

Governor Andrew and the Free Black Regiments

Governor John Andrew of Massachusetts pressured the Federal government for most of 1862 for permission to recruit black soldiers in his state. Andrew followed the formation of the 1st and 2nd South Carolina Volunteer Infantry regiments and provided support to Major General Hunter whenever possible. While petitioning Secretary Stanton and President Lincoln, Andrew spent a great deal of time planning for the day permission to begin recruitment would come.⁷⁴ He finally received permission in January 1863.⁷⁵

Andrew immediately threw himself into the recruitment, equipping, and training of 54th and 55th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry and 5th Massachusetts Volunteer Cavalry. Andrew intended his regiments to be models of efficiency and competence, and spared no expense in the selection of both men and officers. The majority of officers were

⁷²Cornish, *The Sable Arm*, 101-102.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 105.

⁷⁴Richard F. Miller, "Brahmin Janissaries: John A. Andrew Mobilizes Massachusetts' Upper Class for the Civil War," *The New England Quarterly* 75, no. 2 (June 2002): 205.

⁷⁵*Official Records*, 3:3, 21-22.

veterans and Harvard alumni. Andrew recruited primarily among free blacks from New England, but some recruits came from as far away as Canada. By the spring of 1863, Andrew's regiments were mobilized for the war. The 54th and 55th Massachusetts marched through the streets of Boston on their way to South Carolina, a triumphal demonstration of Andrew's vision and recognition of the legitimacy of black soldiers.⁷⁶

Boston Brahmins

Governor Andrew was unpopular before the Civil War among the elite social class of Boston, who were initially disturbed by his reputation as a radical abolitionist. Andrews was not dismayed by their opinions. He included the "Brahmin" upper class of Boston and the educated elite of Massachusetts in his strategy for creating a competent militia, and finding competent officers for black regiments.⁷⁷

Andrew saw leadership as the linchpin for the successful formation of black regiments. For the nucleus of his officer corps, Andrew wanted men with education and ability in leadership proven through success in business and commerce. He understood the mind of the Boston elite, and considered the Brahmin class to be predisposed to service, integrity, and responsibility. Among that class was a self-imposed code of honor that Andrew intended to exploit. By the winter of 1862, numerous Brahmins had proven their skill and bravery in combat and demonstrated competence as officers. Those were

⁷⁶William Elliot Furness, "The Negro as a Soldier," in *Military Essays and Recollections: Papers Read Before the Commandery of the State of Illinois, Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States*, vol. 2 (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Company, 1894), 465-466.

⁷⁷Miller, "Brahmin Janissaries," 209-210.

the men Andrew intended to be the leaders for his new free black regiments.⁷⁸ The touchstone for Andrew's vision was the man he selected to command the 54th Massachusetts, Robert Gould Shaw.

Shaw and the 54th Massachusetts

Twice wounded in battle, a veteran of the Battle of Antietam, well-educated, and a member of a wealthy abolitionist Boston family, Robert Gould Shaw met all of Andrew's criteria for leading black soldiers. However, Andrew was uncertain of the strength of Shaw's convictions and offered him command of the 54th Massachusetts through a letter to Shaw's parents. As Andrew suspected, Shaw initially declined the position. Shaw saw the duty of commanding a black regiment to be monumental. He also doubted his ability to live up to the requirements.⁷⁹

Andrew's gamble on the code of honor among the Brahmin class won in the end. Within a few days of declining Andrew's offer, Shaw recanted and accepted. Shaw may have felt pressure to support the abolitionist efforts of his family. He may have believed deep down that it was the right thing to do. Whatever his reasons for finally accepting the command, his emotions were summed up in a letter to his wife Annie. He stated ~~for~~ while I was undecided I felt ashamed of myself, as if I were cowardly."⁸⁰

⁷⁸Ibid., 210.

⁷⁹Russell Duncan, *Where Death and Glory Meet: Colonel Robert Gould Shaw and the 54th Massachusetts Infantry* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1999), 53-57.

⁸⁰Duncan, *Blue-Eyed Child of Fortune*, 286.

Colonel Shaw was determined to be a conscientious commander. He led the fight for equal pay for black soldiers by boycotting the paymasters. His men and officers followed his example and went without pay for over a year.⁸¹ Shaw also saw a need to demonstrate the steadfastness of men to the public. By July 1863, black regiments had fought at Port Hudson, Milliken's Bend, and in other minor battles. At the battle of Fort Wagner, South Carolina, on the evening of 18 July 1863, Shaw volunteered the 54th Massachusetts to lead the charge. Shaw was killed during the assault and the regiment retreated without capturing the fort. However, the skill demonstrated by the regiment was publicized throughout the North. For his actions during the battle, Sergeant William Carney became the first black soldier to receive the Medal of Honor. The charge on Fort Wagner helped silence those in the Union who still doubted that blacks could serve as soldiers. Shaw's legacy was a competent and successful regiment and the loyalty of his soldiers even unto death.⁸²

General Thomas Goes West to Recruit

By spring 1863, the formal endorsement of raising and fielding black regiments was beginning to emerge. There were a handful of regiments originating from Kansas, South Carolina, Louisiana, and Massachusetts. The problem now was numbers. The speed of recruitment was slow and lacked a unified effort. There was no formal structure for recruiting soldiers or officers on a national level. To remedy this, Stanton sent

⁸¹Joseph T. Wilson, *The Black Phalanx: African American Soldiers in the War of Independence, the War of 1812, and the Civil War* (New York: First Da Capo Press, 1994), 133-134.

⁸²Trudeau, *Like Men of War*, 83-90.

Adjutant General of the Army Brigadier General Lorenzo Thomas into the field in March 1863 to solve this problem. Thomas received sweeping authority to confer with Major General Grant and his subordinate commanders and establish as many black regiments as possible. Likewise, Lincoln gave Thomas the authority to grant commissions for enlisted soldiers and officers to command these new regiments.⁸³ This order was a sea-change in policy. Previously the President and War Department had arbitrarily granted select individuals authority to raise black regiments. Now the War Department took full control and set to standardize the process.⁸⁴ By May 1863, the change in policy was formalized and the War Department created the USCT.

The Birth of the a Standard Policy

The slow development of an official policy for the formation and recruitment of black regiments created frustrations and misunderstandings about the role of black soldiers. Officer selection and recruitment was *ad hoc*.⁸⁵ Some leaders, such as Higginson, Ullmann, and Andrew, valued education and moral character most in officer candidates. Their preferred pool of selection was civilians. Thomas valued candidates with military experience. He saw competence and proven merit in combat leadership as primary. His preferred pool of selection was non-commissioned officers.⁸⁶ These two philosophies eventually merged when General Order Number 144 created the Board of

⁸³*Official Records*, 3:3, 100-102.

⁸⁴Cornish, *The Sable Arm*, 111.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 99.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 37.

Examiners for the Command of Colored Troops. The War Department created the Board of Examiners the same day as the USCT, 22 May 1863. The Board of Examiners became a crucible for white officers. Even though prejudice against black soldiers remained, those candidates who passed the board's test took pride in their accomplishment and newfound position.

CHAPTER 3

SELECTING THE OFFICERS FOR THE USCT

First Lieutenant! Did I hear aright? Yes, there it was on the sheet, written in a bold, round hand. First Lieutenant! I should have a bar on my shoulder-straps, and command the company in the absence of the Captain. The room swam around. I felt as if I was walking on air.

— Freeman S. Bowley, *Honor in Command*

The USCT is Established

The road to establish the USCT was long and riddled with false starts, contradictions, arbitrary authorizations, and individual initiative. As early as September 1861, prominent Northern civilians were overwhelming then Secretary of War Simon Cameron with requests to form black regiments in the North. Cameron responded to the volume of demands by directing requesters appeal to their state governors. In his opinion, governors were responsible for the direct recruitment of militias.⁸⁷ However, there was little incentive for governors to recruit black regiments. They would not receive Federal compensation, bounties, or logistical support. Even the Militia Act of 1862 was confusing. That law authorized the President to use blacks in military service, but did not specify their enlistment as soldiers.⁸⁸ The result was a complex web of official and unofficial authorizations by the President and Secretary of War. Through this cloud of policy, recruitment of black regiments progressed. Despite a lack of formal process, by

⁸⁷Fred A. Shannon, "The Federal Government and the Negro Soldier, 1861-1865," *The Journal of Negro History* 11, no. 4 (October 1926): 565.

⁸⁸United States Congress, *Statutes at Large, Treaties, and Proclamations of the United States of America*, vol. 12 (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1863): 599.

the spring of 1863 recruitment of blacks was common.⁸⁹ Without a unifying policy, this routine translated into inefficiency.

Though recruitment developed into routine, confusion persisted over which regiments were ~~“state militia”~~ controlled by the states and which were ~~“volunteers”~~ controlled by the Federal government. General Order Number 143 established the Bureau of Colored Troops and the USCT and ended the confusion. The Bureau of Colored Troops was now responsible for all black units. Authorization for recruitment was centralized, standardized, and overseen by the Federal government. Though Northern governors were still allowed to recruit blacks for the USCT, and Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas authorized regiments in occupied Confederate states, all existing and new units came under the control of the USCT.⁹⁰ Standardization brought a much needed boost to efficiency in recruitment and organization at a time when the Union Army was experiencing a manning shortfall. Besides, depriving the enemy of the use of black labor was considered ~~“a~~ measure of war” and a means to Union victory.⁹¹

With the formation of the USCT, the floodgates of recruitment were opened. Thomas’s efforts at recruiting in the occupied territories showed promise immediately. By May 1863, he had raised over twelve regiments, and he projected a goal of 20,000 recruits (twenty regiments).⁹² In the North, Governor David Tod of Ohio was recruiting

⁸⁹Shannon, ~~“The Federal Government and the Negro Soldier,”~~ 574.

⁹⁰GO 143.

⁹¹Donald Stoker, *The Grand Design: Strategy and the U.S. Civil War* (Oxford, MA: Oxford University Press, 2010), 227-229.

⁹²*Official Records*, 3:3, 212-214.

black soldiers in his state on behalf of Governor John Andrew of Massachusetts until Andrew reported that he could not support any more recruits. Tod then requested and received permission to recruit his own USCT regiments.⁹³ Tod was now obliged to form his own USCT regiments since he received full “credit” for his recruitment quota under the new policy. The policy of allowing state governors to receive credit for black soldiers enlisting into the USCT increased recruitment of black soldiers among Northern states.⁹⁴

To add further impetus to recruitment of blacks, the American Freedmen’s Inquiry Commission reported in June 1863 that it would be possible and desirable to recruit 200,000 blacks among the occupied territories of the Confederacy. The commission’s preliminary report also emphasized the value of white officers leading black regiments and the need for a steady stream of white officer recruits to replace those who might fall in battle or succumb to disease.⁹⁵ Pioneers in the formation of black regiments, such as Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson, also voiced a need to man black regiments with white officers. Higginson testified “If they lose their officers the effect will be worse upon them than upon white troops; not because they are timid, but because they are less accustomed to entire self-reliance.”⁹⁶ The need to continually man black regiments resulted in a habit of over-manning units with white officers to ensure that casualties would not create regiments lacking in officer leadership.

⁹³Ibid., 229, 372.

⁹⁴Ibid., 350, 378.

⁹⁵Ibid., 438-440.

⁹⁶Ibid., 439.

This surge of new black regiments within the USCT and officer over-manning put a strain on the pool of available qualified officers. The majority of officers who served with black regiments prior to the USCT were volunteer officers, non-commissioned officers, or civilians who received their commissions through patronage or by recruiting the regiments themselves. Their one common denominator was a dedication to abolitionism prior to the war. This pool was quickly exhausted. Recruiting new officers on a large scale became a major difficulty for the USCT. Seventy-five United States Colored Infantry (USCI) regiments were formed in 1863 alone. Each USCI regiment required 45 to 60 combat officers. Table 1 relates officer manning of infantry regiments only and demonstrates how the officer requirement surged in 1863 when General Order 143 created the USCT.

Table 1. Pattern of Formation and Officer Requirement for USCI Regiments		
Actual Year of USCI Formation	Regiments Formed During the Year	Officers Required During the Year
1862	2	82
1863	75	3,075
1864	49	1,517
1865	12	492
Total Number of Regiments	138	
Minimum officers required for mustering regiments		5,658

Source: Paul D. Renard, “The Selection and Preparation of White Officers for the Command of Black Troops in the American Civil War: A Study of the 41st and 100th U.S. Colored Infantry” (Ph.D. diss., Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 2006), 144-145.

Accounting for attrition, over 3,000 officers were needed just to man the regiments created in 1863. Over the course of the Civil War the War Department created

138 USCI regiments, which required over 5,600 officers to form the regiments. Accounting for casualties and attrition, over 7,000 officers were needed. The standard pool of officers proved completely inadequate.⁹⁷ The USCT needed a method of selecting and screening non-commissioned officers and civilians for commissions. The Board of Examiners for Applicants of Command of Colored Troops provided that method.⁹⁸

The Officer Selection Boards are Established

The War Department specified that all applicants for command of black troops must pass an oral examination board. Examination boards were not new. The War Department had authorized examination boards in July 1861 to review the qualification of volunteer officers. These boards were rarely convened and often used only to remove state appointed officers who had demonstrated complete incompetence. Likewise, a Board of Examiners for the Invalid Corps (later Veteran Reserve Corps) selected officers for that organization.⁹⁹ Unlike previously authorized boards, the USCT boards were overseen by the Bureau of Colored Troops and enforced by the Adjutant General.

The initial guidance was vague and only stated that the boards would “convene as such posts as may be decided upon by the War Department.”¹⁰⁰ The Bureau of Colored Troops quickly established a dual system for examination boards. For the 86 regiments recruited directly through the efforts of the Bureau of Colored Troops and the northern

⁹⁷Renard, “The Selection and Preparation of White Officers,” 143-145.

⁹⁸U.S. War Department, *General Order(GO) No. 144*, 22 May 1863.

⁹⁹*Official Records* 3:1, 349.

¹⁰⁰GO 143.

states, candidates appeared either before the Washington examination board, or a board present in one of the departments. For the 70 regiments raised through the efforts of Adjutant General Thomas, candidates appeared before a division or corps level board composed of colonels and general officers from the command.¹⁰¹ Both systems stressed the merit of the candidate. Likewise, both systems required a subsequent examination to advance in rank.¹⁰²

General Order 144 directed the boards to examine every applicant as to ~~physical~~, mental, and moral fitness to command troops.”¹⁰³ The board specified the rank a candidate would receive based on his demonstration of merit and proficiency. Areas tested included knowledge of reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, common regulations, and history. If the candidate had Army experience, he had to demonstrate knowledge of tactics. The report of the board was final and any applicant rejected was not allowed another chance at examination. Failure permanently barred the candidate from a USCT commission.¹⁰⁴ With an opportunity to receive an Army commission, many men took their chances before the board. There were almost as many reasons for trying as candidates.

¹⁰¹Blassingame, “Selection of Officers and Non-commissioned Officers,” 9.

¹⁰²Ibid.; GO 143.

¹⁰³GO 144.

¹⁰⁴Special Washington Dispatches, *Times* (New York: 5 June 1863).

Motivation of Some Candidates

There were numerous reasons for seeking a commission in the USCT. Some reasons were wholly personal. Some reasons were the desire to be a member of an elite organization (due to the selectivity of the board), social advancement as an officer, abolitionist sympathies, better pay, or a desire to further the war effort.¹⁰⁵ The USCT recruited soldiers and officers from every geographical area. This method expanded the pool of candidates and nearly guaranteed that officers from multiple regions would serve in the same regiment. As a result, state pride and regional parochialism seldom motivated USCT officers.¹⁰⁶

Sergeant Henry Crydenwise had a very personal reason. During an investigation he was ordered to conduct regarding the murder of a black man by a white soldier, Crydenwise found proof that would ensure a conviction. To his astonishment, the provost marshal refused to charge and ignored the evidence. Crydenwise wrote his parents, ~~a~~ negroes[sic] life is little more regarded than that of a dog . . . 'tis time something was done to teach people that a negroes[sic] life cannot be taken with impunity for every slight offense."¹⁰⁷ Crydenwise sought and received a commission in the USCT out of his personal sense of justice.

Freeman Bowley sought a commission out of financial necessity. Bowley's father was a veteran and medically discharged shortly after the Battle of Gettysburg. As the

¹⁰⁵Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle*, 39-41.

¹⁰⁶Shannon, "The Federal Government and the Negro Soldier," 578.

¹⁰⁷Crydenwise to parents, 22 December 1863, Henry M. Crydenwise Papers; quoted in *Forged in Battle*, 41.

only man in his home able to work, Bowley decided to drop out of school and join the Army himself. Bowley applied to appear before the Washington Board of Examiners. He submitted his application two months before his 18th birthday. His previous education at a local military academy, keen observation, and dedication to study for the exam helped him earn a commission as a 1st lieutenant.¹⁰⁸

Henry and Eben Whitney were brothers and members of a religious Republican family from New Jersey. Eben initially served in the war as a hospital attendant treating war wounded. The Emancipation Proclamation motivated the brothers to join the Union Army. They made preparations throughout 1863 to ensure their family was financially secure. The brothers decided to seek commissions in the USCT over enlisting in a white regiment because of the legislation passed by the Confederate Congress to execute white officers who lead black soldiers in combat. Both brothers passed the board as lieutenants. Henry was assigned to the 45th USCI and Eben to the 30th USCI.¹⁰⁹

Regardless of their individual reasons for appearing before the Board of Examiners, those who received commissions in the USCT felt satisfaction in their achievement. Their ability to meet the requirements imposed by the board engendered confidence and dedication in its own right. As Crydenwise stated, –Any one if he has

¹⁰⁸Keith Wilson, ed., *Honor in Command: Lt. Freeman S. Bowley's Civil War Service in the 30th United States Colored Infantry*, (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006): 47-53.

¹⁰⁹Daniel Barrett and Mary Alice Harvey, *Barrett Brothers Family History: Henry Whitney*, –The Life of Henry Whitney–the War Years,” <http://barrettbrothersfamilyhistory.blogspot.com/search/lavle/Henry%20Whitney> (accessed 21 February 2011).

money can get a position in a white reg't(sic) but not so here.”¹¹⁰ Crydenwise was apparently right to be proud. The requirements to receive a commission seemed attainable —by any bright young man having a fair common school education.”¹¹¹ In fact, as of December 1863, 491 out of 1051 of the applicants to the Washington Board of Examiners failed their examination.¹¹² It seemed that motivation did not guarantee success, especially if a candidate appeared before one of the notoriously difficult regional boards.

The Regional Boards

The Boards of Examination of Applicants for Command of Colored Troops were differentiated into regional boards established in major northern cities and field boards convened by corps and division commanders on an *ad hoc* basis. The Bureau of Colored Troops established three regional boards in the summer of 1863 under the authority of General Order Number 144. The board presidents and locations were Major General Silas Casey of the Washington board, Colonel Henry Van Rensselaer of the Cincinnati board, and Colonel Daniel Huston of the St. Louis board. The Bureau of Colored Troops eventually established other boards in regional cities such as Nashville and Davenport, but the first three boards were the most active and well known during the Civil War. By

¹¹⁰Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle*, 39.

¹¹¹John H. Taggart, *Free Military School for Applicants for Command of Colored Troops* (Philadelphia: King and Baird, 1864), 3.

¹¹²*Ibid.*, 4.

October 1863, these three boards alone accepted 1,534 applicants. They examined 918 and approved 517 for commissions.¹¹³

Conduct of the Boards

Before appearing before the Washington Board of Examiners, an applicant who was currently a soldier needed a letter of recommendation from his company, regimental, and division commanders as well as formal leave to attend the board. A civilian required suitable letters of endorsement from prominent members of his community. The applicant submitted a formal request, with letters of recommendation and endorsement, to Major Charles W. Foster, Assistant Adjutant General and Chief of the Bureau of Colored Troops. Foster screened the applicants and issued authority to appear before the board. This first step, though formulaic and administrative, remained significant in the process. Foster was notoriously scrupulous and demanding in what he expected in an application. Foster often rejected applicants for weak recommendations, vague praises of their ability, and even spelling errors in their application.¹¹⁴

General Order Number 144 was vague on the conduct of the boards. It specified that boards meet from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Saturday, and that applicants receive permission and letters of recommendation to appear.¹¹⁵ Foster established working principles to guide the boards in their grading and selection. Foster

¹¹³*Official Records*, 3:3, 1113-1114.

¹¹⁴Colored Troops: A New Era in Our Military Life, *Times* (New York: 2 November 1863).

¹¹⁵GO 144.

used the “schools” of instruction that were common in tactical manuals of the time to categorize candidates’ knowledge. All candidates needed to be literate, know basic army regulations, and be familiar with the School of the Soldier and the Company. The School of the Soldier and Company included standard platoon and company level drills and formations. The candidate’s performance determined whether he received a commission as a 2nd Lieutenant or 1st Lieutenant. To receive a commission as a Captain or Major, a candidate needed to demonstrate mastery of the School of the Battalion. This included regimental drills and tactics. Finally, knowledge of the School of the Brigade was necessary for a candidate to receive a commission as a Lieutenant Colonel or Colonel.¹¹⁶ Board presidents added their own requirements. General Casey, who also supervised the conduct of regional boards, established the standard in the category of questions normally asked. The reputation of the boards for harsh standards became infamous.¹¹⁷ The most well known was Casey’s Washington board.

The Washington board was the most productive and also the most notoriously difficult. Casey stressed good moral character, physical ability, and loyalty. He also expanded the area of knowledge beyond the traditional Schools enumerated by Foster. Questions during the Washington board included arithmetic, geography, and history.¹¹⁸ Casey believed it was the job of the board to weed out incompetence of every kind. Failed candidates who perceived Casey’s interest in minutiae as unnecessary for a USCT

¹¹⁶Taggart, *Free Military School*, 4-5.

¹¹⁷Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle*, 52.

¹¹⁸Colored Troops: A New Era in Our Military Life, *Times* (New York: 2 November 1863).

leader criticized him publically. Casey responded to such comments with, “Eschew all humbuggery and mere pretensions, and let merit be the test of advancement. Let it be impressed deeply on the conscience of every man of influence or authority, that when he places in command an incompetent officer he is guilty of manslaughter.” Casey believed that incompetence was a significant reason for the failure of white regiments. He hoped the board system established for the USCT would spread to the rest of the Army and become the standard for officer selection.¹¹⁹

Candidates who appeared before the regional boards could expect to wait for several days or up to a week before their turn came. Candidates reported each morning to the secretary of the board to see if they were on the day’s list. If not, they returned to their lodging, and often continued to prepare for the exam. Often they would socialize with other candidates leaving the board and ask for information about the exam.¹²⁰ This information and publicity about the exams provided candidates with a general sense of what to expect. Still, each experience was unique.

The Washington board rejected nearly half of all applicants examined by the end of 1863. Two-thirds of applicants rejected were privates, non-commissioned officers, or officers. High ranking applicants who were rejected decried the boards standards were either too difficult to meet or did not cover the realm of military matters.¹²¹ Members of the board claimed they took their duty seriously, and continually declared that they

¹¹⁹Officers of Colored Regiments: a Letter from Major-General Casey, *Times* (New York: 26 September 1863).

¹²⁰Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle*, 48-49.

¹²¹Cornish, *The Sable Arm*, 217.

wanted officers who could lead. In their minds, education and intelligence were necessary components to lead, inspire, and gain the confidence of their subordinates, who were often former slaves, —whereas if badly officered, they will be badly taught, badly cared for, badly led, and the whole experiment of putting colored troops in the field will prove a failure.”¹²² Casey’s standards were high. The price was time and energy searching for qualified candidates.

Statistics and Standards

Casey noted that the majority of candidates with combat experience would have passed if they had received a few weeks instruction in tactics and administration. This shortcoming presented a problem in Casey’s mind. He regretted turning away candidates who were experienced but lacked the education to focus that experience.¹²³ Table 2 shows the number of applicants examined by the Washington Board, by rank, and the commission each received. Table 2 also shows the number of candidates accepted and rejected by rank.¹²⁴

¹²²Taggart, *Free Military School*, 16.

¹²³Keith Wilson, —Thomas Webster and the Free Military School for Applicants for Command of Colored Troops,” *Civil War History* 29, no. 3 (June 1983): 103.

¹²⁴Table 2 does not show the number of applicants appointed or rejected who were graduates of the Free Military School.

Table 2. Washington Examination Board Applicant Examination Results, as of 29 March 1864								
Rank of Applicant	Number Examined	Number Accepted and Rank Recommended						Rejected
		Colonel	Lt. Colonel	Major	Captain	1st Lieutenant	2nd Lieutenant	
Colonel	4	0	0	2	0	0	0	2
Lt. Colonel	3	0	2	0	0	1	0	0
Major	9	2	3	1	2	0	0	1
Captain	68	3	7	8	20	5	3	22
1st Lieutenant	52	3	0	4	10	8	7	20
2nd Lieutenant	24	0	0	0	9	2	3	10
Sergeant	505	0	1	0	62	75	133	234
Corporal	230	0	0	0	23	46	64	97
Private	449	0	0	0	26	57	124	242
Civilian	429	1	6	15	48	49	94	216
Total:	1,773	9	19	30	200	243	428	844

Source: John H. Taggart, *Free Military School for Applicants for Command of Colored Troops* (Philadelphia: King and Baird, 1864), 27.

The Washington Examination Board had its critics. Some prominent applicants who failed the examination not only questioned the efficacy of the board but attacked the methods of the board members. Some attempted to circumvent the board by appealing directly to either Stanton or Lincoln.¹²⁵ Julius W. Adams conducted perhaps the most notorious example of a public protest of the board's methods. Adams was a former colonel in the New York militia and brevet brigadier general of volunteers. Adams was confident in his ability to secure a command of a USCT regiment and appeared before the board with glowing recommendations. After a series of 69 questions (Adams recorded

¹²⁵Requisites of a General: A Story Evoked by One of Lincoln's Letters, *Times* (New York: 24 April 1886).

the specifics of each question after the exam), he was rejected by the board for refusing to submit to the requisite physical examination.¹²⁶

The injury to Adams' ego was actually inflicted by the board's recommendation, rather than his administrative rejection. Later Adams learned that the board had graded him as a major. This affront to Adams, who saw himself as a great field commander, resulted in a flurry of letters in regional papers in which Adams attacked the credibility of the board and Casey personally. The response from Casey was a cutting letter in which he calmly defended the board's actions and stated that the level of questioning was commensurate with both Adams' alleged experience and the position he sought. Casey stated, "He was found equally deficient in the battalion drill, especially for one who had commanded a regiment in the field . . . as he himself tells us, and not particularly bright on the other subjects of his examination . . . the examination to which he was subjected resulted so poorly, that the Board charitably saved him the mortification of further failure."¹²⁷ Clearly Casey did not suffer fools lightly.

What concerned Casey was not so much the performance of blowhards like Adams but of bright young men with experience who had the potential to lead, but lacked the backing of education and theory to implement their talent. To alleviate his concern, Casey turned to an acquaintance, Thomas Webster, a Philadelphia philanthropist and prominent member of the Philadelphia Union League. In June 1863, the Philadelphia Union League created the Supervisory Committee for Enlistment of Colored Troops and

¹²⁶Julius W. Adams, *Letters to the Honorable Secretary of war, on the Examination of Field Officers for Colored Troops*, 2nd ed. (no publisher, 1863), 15-18.

¹²⁷*Ibid.*, 21.

actively recruited USCT regiments throughout Pennsylvania. Casey believed the Supervisory Committee was ideally capable of creating and resourcing an academy to train applicants prior to going before the Washington board.¹²⁸ Soon after, the Supervisory Committee established the Free Military School for Applicants for Command of Colored Troops in Philadelphia.

The Free Military School

The Free Military School was born out of unique and complementary interests. Stanton authorized the Supervisory Committee to raise black regiments in the summer of 1863, just shortly after the creation of the USCT. The Supervisory Committee thus had a vested interest in qualified officers to command those regiments. At the urging of Casey, the committee formed a special fund to finance the Free Military School. This school serviced Casey's and Foster's interests by providing a means to increase the number of applicants who could pass the board without lowering the standards Casey had established. To this end, the school developed an initial curriculum tailored to meet the needs of the exam.¹²⁹ The stated purpose of the curriculum was to prepare candidates to pass the USCT Board of Examination. Webster ensured that the secondary purpose of the school was to develop the students' character and instill what he considered the necessary ethical and moral mindset to lead black soldiers.¹³⁰

¹²⁸Wilson, "Thomas Webster and the Free Military School," 102-103.

¹²⁹Ibid., 104.

¹³⁰Ibid., 101-102.

The school opened its doors with just two students in December 1863. The Chief Preceptor was Colonel John H. Taggart, former commander of the 12th Pennsylvania Reserve Regiment. The curriculum was a 30 day course of instruction modeled on the tactics manual Casey had written himself.¹³¹ To this curriculum Webster and Taggart added instruction in mathematics, geography, history, and Army regulations.¹³² The school was not at all “free” but funded through donations to the Supervisory Committee. The committee paid for all materials and faculty stipends. Students were expected to provide their own transportation, lodging accommodations, and meals.¹³³ Although the curriculum was limited, the intensity of instruction was robust and its results were seen in the performance of the graduates at the board.

The School’s Impact on the Board

On 7 March 1864, Casey wrote Webster to congratulate him on the success of the school’s curriculum of instruction. As of that time, Casey wrote, the Washington Board of Examiners had yet to reject a graduate of the Free Military School. Even Stanton took time to write Webster with his endorsement. Casey stated in a letter to the school that as of March 1864, the graduates of the Free Military School had a 98 percent pass rate.¹³⁴

¹³¹Cornish, *The Sable Arm*, 218.

¹³²Taggart, *Free Military School*, 22.

¹³³Frederick M. Binder, “Philadelphia’s Free Military School,” *Pennsylvania History* 17, no. 4 (October 1950): 287.

¹³⁴Cornish, *The Sable Arm*, 218.

Table 3 shows the success of the school's students at the board and the commissions they were awarded.

Table 3. Free Military School Graduates' Examination Results, Washington Board, as of 29 March 1864								
Rank of Applicant	Number Examined	Number Accepted and Rank Recommended						Rejected
		Colonel	Lt. Colonel	Major	Captain	1st Lieutenant	2nd Lieutenant	
Sergeant	14	0	1	0	3	3	6	1
Corporal	8	0	0	0	2	4	2	0
Private	33	1	0	1	9	11	10	1
Civilian ¹³⁵	39	1	3	5	14	6	8	2
Total:	94	2	4	6	28	24	26	4

Source: John H. Taggart, *Free Military School for Applicants for Command of Colored Troops* (Philadelphia: King and Baird, 1864), 28.

Word of the successful performance of the school's graduates at the board quickly spread among prospective candidates. The Supervisory Committee published 8,000 copies of the school's prospectus after opening. Within three months, the supply was exhausted and the committee was forced to print a second edition. In the first three months of operation, from December 1863 to March 1864 the Free Military School received 1,691 applications from 17 states, the District of Columbia, and a dozen foreign countries and territories.¹³⁶ The school became so popular that the Bureau of Colored Troops began to receive requests from the field for special furloughs so applicants could

¹³⁵Many of these civilian applicants had previously served a 3, 6, or 9 month enlistment; some even served a 3 year enlistment. All who previously enlisted were honorably discharged prior to attending the school.

¹³⁶*Ibid.*, 220; Taggart, *Free Military School*, 32.

attend the school prior to their appearance at the Board of Examiners. The Bureau initially resisted the idea, but soon relented. By the end of March 1864 the Bureau relented under the pressure from applicants and issued General Order Number 125. This authorized commanders to grant 30 days of special furlough to soldiers to travel to Philadelphia specifically to attend the Free Military School.¹³⁷

Nearly half of the school's initial applicants were civilians. Soon after the school opened, it was considered remedial tactical training for civilians and inexperienced soldiers. Experienced veterans quickly saw the school's benefits and began to apply in order to improve their examination performance and increase their chance of securing a commission. Even some officers eventually saw the school as a means to increase their chances of receiving a commission at a higher rank.¹³⁸

The School's Standards

One of the reasons for the school's success rate was its strict admissions policy. The school screened applicants thoroughly prior to admission. By March 1864 only half of the applicants (843 out of 1,691) to the school met the standards of acceptance. Only half of those were actively enrolled (422 out of 843) and the remainders were awaiting their furlough and travel arrangements to attend. Reasons given for an applicant's rejection varied but most often included a lack of proper references, lack of even a

¹³⁷Cornish, *The Sable Arm*, 218-219.

¹³⁸Wilson, "Thomas Webster and the Free Military School," 105-106.

rudimentary education (applicants had to at least read and write), or an inability to secure an approved furlough.¹³⁹

Once an applicant was admitted, he could expect to attend class six days a week for 30 days. Classes were held from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. with a final dress parade at the end of the day. The day was divided into three periods, with classroom instruction broken up by practical drill and tactics. Mathematics and general academics were taught in the evening. Table 4 gives a breakdown of the schedule of instruction.

Table 4. Free Military School Schedule of Instruction	
Monday through Saturday	Subject of Instruction
9:00 a.m.-10:30 a.m.	Classroom instruction in tactics
10:45 a.m.-12:00 p.m.	Parade ground instruction in drill
12:00 p.m.-2:00 p.m.	Lunch (students were expected to provide their own meals)
2:00 p.m.-3:30 p.m.	Classroom instruction in tactics
3:30 p.m.-5:00 p.m.	Parade ground instruction in drill
5:00 p.m.	Dress parade and daily orders read (Class adjutant's report of daily attendance due at 6:00 p.m.)
-Evening"	Mathematics, remedial instruction, special additional instruction for advanced students

Source: John H. Taggart, *Free Military School for Applicants for Command of Colored Troop* (Philadelphia: King and Baird, 1864), 18-19.

In addition to the demanding academic schedule, students were expected to follow a strict honor code. Roll was taken twice a day and any student absent without prior approval was suspended. All students, including civilians, were expected to pay proper

¹³⁹Ibid., 111.

military respect to their instructors. Inattentiveness was considered a violation of the school's code. Likewise students were expected to act as assistant instructors during certain classes where they might have either advanced experience or demonstrated aptitude.¹⁴⁰

The students were segregated into four ~~el~~asses" centered on Foster's Schools of the Soldier, Company, and Battalion, with the faculty instructing especially promising students in all three volumes of Casey's *Infantry Tactics* manual. Instruction corresponded to the ~~el~~ass" the student was placed in and type of commission each applicant sought. Those applying as lieutenants focused on infantry tactics, muster and pay rolls, company book keeping, and ~~at~~ least such education as can be obtained at a common school." Those applying to be captains needed to master the same knowledge as lieutenants, and be familiar with battalion formations and ~~have~~ a better general education." Applicants for major and lieutenant colonel needed to master the knowledge required of lower ranks and be familiar enough with their duties as to ~~in~~struct them, if deficient." An applicant who sought commission as a colonel of a regiment ~~should~~ be a gentleman of very superior qualification" and should be ~~master~~ of the entire subject of Army Regulations . . . and should be a man of rare spirit, industry, and executive ability." Students who demonstrated advanced proficiency were encouraged to move up to the next ~~el~~ass." The Free Military School's philosophy was that the duty of the Board of

¹⁴⁰Taggart, *Free Military School*, 19-23.

Examiners was to differentiate zeal and pretense from knowledge and merit. It was the school's role to instill the merit and knowledge in the applicant.¹⁴¹

Efforts to Expand the School's Influence

Supervisory Committee Chair Thomas Webster believed that the Bureau of Colored Troops should require all applicants to appear before the Washington Board of Examiners. He distrusted the efficacy of the other regional boards, and the corps and division boards more so. Webster made his appeal directly to Stanton, who ignored the suggestion more due to impracticality of implementing such a system than because it lacked merit.¹⁴² The time and resources required transporting soldiers located in the far western military departments to and from each board, and the backlog it would have created in an already stressed system would have been too great. This obstacle did not stop Webster from attempting to influence the screening criteria boards used in selecting officers.

Following the publicity of the mutiny of black soldiers of the 4th Regiment, Corps d'Afrique at Fort Jackson, Louisiana, Webster and members of the school's Supervisory Committee urged Casey to add an ethical component to his examinations. The soldiers of the 4th Regiment had rebelled against the brutal treatment of them by their officers, especially the regimental executive officer, Lieutenant Colonel Augustus C. Benedict. Webster and the Supervisory Committee believed an ethical examination would have

¹⁴¹Ibid., 4-5.

¹⁴²Frederick M. Binder, "Pennsylvania Negro Regiments in the Civil War," *The Journal of Negro History* 37, no. 4 (October 1952): 403.

aided in eliminating applicants with a mercenary or sadist inclination. For their part, the Supervisor Committee appointed a professor of ethical education to the Free Military School's faculty.¹⁴³ Another method the Supervisory Committee used to ensure proper treatment by candidates of the men they commanded was familiarizing candidates with leading black soldiers.

The Supervisory Committee established a working relationship with Colonel Louis Wagner, commander of Camp William Penn, to allow select students to practice drilling with the black soldiers training there. Camp William Penn was the largest camp single camp for the organization and training of USCT regiments and was located directly outside of Philadelphia and within close proximity to the Free Military School.¹⁴⁴ Recent graduates were also sent to Camp William Penn while waiting for permission to appear before the board. Graduates were given practical training in the command of black regiments. This arrangement was mutually beneficial for candidates and recruiters organizing the new regiments, which were not yet fully staffed with officers.¹⁴⁵

Webster hoped to expand the influence of the school until it became a nationalized institution. As a step toward this goal, the Free Military School attempted to expand its influence into other examination boards. The Veteran Reserve Corps had a similar process for examining privates and non-commissioned officers to become officers

¹⁴³Wilson, "Thomas Webster and the Free Military School," 106-107.

¹⁴⁴Taggart, *Free Military School*, 7.

¹⁴⁵Wilson, "Thomas Webster and the Free Military School," 110.

in that organization. Webster intended to expand the school's accommodations and accept potential applicants for the Board of Examiners for the Veteran Reserve Corps.¹⁴⁶

The Free Military School and Non-commissioned Officers

The Free Military School was established to train white students to become officers in the USCT. Soon after the school's graduates began to prove themselves at the Washington Board, it opened its doors to a select number of educated black soldiers. The Auxiliary School, as it was known, intended not to prepare these soldiers for the board, but train them in order to assume positions in regiments with a large percentage of illiterate non-commissioned officers and soldiers. In this way the Supervisory Committee hoped to use the Free Military School to raise the overall quality of black non-commissioned officers within the USCT. Twenty-one black students were enrolled for this purpose by the end of March 1864.¹⁴⁷ Webster and the Supervisory Committee recognized the ability of black non-commissioned officers to lead and instruct other black soldiers, but they never envisioned them acting as commissioned officers. The Auxiliary School attempted to educate black men to be superior non-commissioned officers, but the Free Military School proper never accepted a black student for officer training.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶Taggart, *Free Military School*, 11-12.

¹⁴⁷Binder, "Pennsylvania Negro Regiments in the Civil War," 403-404.

¹⁴⁸Wilson, "Thomas Webster and the Free Military School," 114.

The Free Military School Runs its Course

The Free Military School was able to graduate and send between 24 and 30 students to the Washington Board each week.¹⁴⁹ Before closing, the school had enrolled 1,031 students, with the majority going on to pass the Washington Board. As the USCT regiments began to fill, and the war began to wind down, the school saw a steady decrease in enrollment. Following dwindling USCT recruiting, tension between Webster and the Supervisory Committee about the future role of the School, and lack of adequate funding, the Free Military School closed on 15 September 1864. The War Department was impressed with the assistance the school provided and requested that it continue. However, the Supervisory Committee itself dissolved by the end of 1864.¹⁵⁰

Many potential applicants still saw value in the training provided by the school. Taggart was able to open a for-fee school a short distance from the location of the Free Military School. Taggart called his school the U.S. Military School for Officers and followed a curriculum similar to that of the Free Military School. The U.S. Military School received a good start by taking in the students and applicants who had not yet graduated from the Free Military School. Taggart was forced to close his new school due to lack of support just as the war ended in 1865. Although neither the Free Military School nor the U.S. Military School continued beyond the Civil War, they both provided

¹⁴⁹Blassingame, "The Selection of Officers and Non-commissioned Officers," 8.

¹⁵⁰Binder, "Philadelphia's Free Military School," 291.

an alternative model for officer education that went beyond the traditional curriculum of established military academies of that time.¹⁵¹

Efforts at Unit Level Officer Training and Development

The Free Military School inspired training programs in other regiments. Partly in response to the official sanction given the Free Military School by General Order Number 125, Colonel Patrick H. Jones, commander of the 154th New York Volunteers, created a board of three officers from the regiment to screen and recommend soldiers to attend the Free Military School. This step formalized the recommendation process within his regiment and allowed those who desired to apply for USCT commissions and receive command endorsement, a standard process. In addition to recommending applicants to the Free Military School, Jones' board vetted applicants for examination at the regional board. Jones' intention was for the board ~~to~~ examine into the capacity, character and conduct of such Enlisted men of this Regiment as may present themselves for examination with a view of entering the Free Military School." If Jones' intention was to weed out frivolous applicants, he was most likely successful. Only one soldier that appeared before his regimental board, Private Ariel H. Wellman, passed the regimental examination, was sent to the Free Military School, and passed the Board of Examiners. Wellman was commissioned a 1st Lieutenant and served with the USCT from August

¹⁵¹Berlin, *Freedom*, 408.

1864 to January 1866, achieved the rank of Captain and commanded Company D, 42nd USCI.¹⁵²

Along with regimental boards to pre-screen applicants, some commanders intended to create unit level training programs. Brigadier General James C. Rice created a brigade level training program to prepare officer candidates to pass the boards of examination. Rice's reputation as a competent leader and the quality of the training he offered impressed the Bureau of Colored Troops.¹⁵³ Foster personally ensured the general that he would accept the application of any candidate Rice had trained in his brigade and personally endorsed. Unfortunately Rice was killed at the Battle of Spotsylvania Court House in May 1864, and the influence that his training program could have had on the rest of the division will never be known.¹⁵⁴

Regimental training in tactics and drill varied from unit to unit and was mostly dependent on the discipline and temperament of the regimental commander. Some white regiments did train whenever possible, mostly in the evening, and attempted to refine the abilities of their leaders.¹⁵⁵ However, these regiments were the exception. Many commanders of white regiments found it difficult to enforce training standards, especially

¹⁵²Mark H. Dunkelman, "Through White Eyes: The 154th New York Volunteers and African-Americans in the Civil War," *The Journal of Negro History* 85, no. 3 (Summer 2000): 106.

¹⁵³Rice was promoted to Brigadier General for his leadership during the defense of Little Round Top during the Battle of Gettysburg.

¹⁵⁴Renard, "The Selection and Preparation of White Officers," 188.

¹⁵⁵Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank, the Common Soldier of the Union*, updated edition (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana University Press, 2008), 50-52.

among new recruits who were not used to the regimented structure of army life.

Likewise, many well intentioned officers learned difficult lessons in the value of Army regulations. Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson summed up the problems officers made for themselves by not following established regulations, ~~(he)~~ rarely enters on that heroic measure of cutting red-tape without finding at last that he has entangled his own fingers in the process.”¹⁵⁶ Facing discrimination towards their unit, and racism towards their men, white officers of black regiments learned quickly that they did not have the luxury of ignoring regulations.

Whereas regulations and discipline may have been seen as ~~red-tape~~” to many officers in white regiments, officers of black regiments were indoctrinated as to the value and necessity of regulation and drill as a means of maintaining discipline and protecting the interests of their soldiers. Though training varied among USCT and white regiments, there was a discernable effort among USCT officers to act in a conscientious manner. While forming at Camp Meigs, the 54th Massachusetts practiced regularly in the School of the Battalion. Every officer attended instruction, which also involved non-commissioned officers. Training was distributive; corporals and sergeants trained the squads, and were in turn trained by a senior captain.¹⁵⁷

Colonel Higginson was equally conscientious regarding the training of his regiment. He commented regarding tactics training that ~~it~~ is never left discretionary in

¹⁵⁶Thomas Wentworth Higginson, ~~Regular and Volunteer Officers,~~” *The Atlantic Monthly* 14, no. 83 (September 1864): 351.

¹⁵⁷Luis F. Emilio, *A Brave Black Regiment: The History of the 54th Massachusetts, 1863-1865* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1995), 23.

what place an officer shall stand, or in what words he shall give an order. All variations would seem to imply negligence.” Higginson saw this negligence and variance not only as a sign of poor discipline, but as a matter of life and death. He commented –Moreover the great need of uniformity is this: that, in the field, soldiers of different companies, and even of different regiments, are liable to be intermingled and a diversity of orders may throw everything into confusion. Confusion means Bull Run.”¹⁵⁸ Higginson was greatly influenced not only by his moral convictions, but also his personal experiences in combat as a junior officer.

One of the more comprehensive officer training programs in the USCT was established by Colonel Reuben Delavan Mussey, commander of the 100th USCI. In addition to his command responsibilities, Mussey was the Commissioner for Organization of the USCT and coordinator for the Nashville Board of Examiners. Prior to the war Mussey was a teacher and his father was a prominent physician and medical professor. Mussey intended to use his experience and position to create a school, modeled after the Free Military School, to prepare candidates for the Nashville Board. Though he was unable to form a full-time school, Mussey did establish a formalized system of lectures and classes that resembled contemporary Officer Professional Development programs. Mussey enlisted the aid of experts in diverse fields and topics, usually covering practical military matters such as medical hygiene in camp. Mussey called the study groups created for his development program –quizzes” and intended for them to be

¹⁵⁸Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Army Life in a Black Regiment* (Boston: Fields, Osgood, and Company, 1870), 46.

collaborative learning environments. His hope was to create more professional officers as well as prepare candidates for the examination board.¹⁵⁹

Training and professional development is valuable for any officer, but the professional education and training of USCT officers was vitally important to the success of their regiments. The requirements of leadership were unique for USCT officers. The majority of the soldiers were former slaves, and the majority of them had transitioned nearly directly from slavery into the USCT. Their first taste of freedom was as a soldier, and they often confused attempts to maintain discipline and order with efforts to stifle their freedom. Though they took well to drill and field craft, their rankling at the regulations often resulted in infractions of discipline that would not have been tolerated in a white regiment. The USCT officers needed to discipline and control their soldiers in a manner that encouraged commitment, and rewarded efficiency, while avoiding constant punishment and reprimand. To do this, USCT officers had to develop themselves professionally and learn to lead their men in a manner that was sensitive to their particular temperament.¹⁶⁰ They needed to control without being coercive and reward without being patronizing. That part of officer development was rarely trained directly and it was left to each individual USCT officer to find his own method of leadership.

¹⁵⁹Paul D. Renard, "Reuben Delavan Mussey: Unheralded Architect of the Civil War's U.S. Colored Troops," *Military Collector and Historian* 58, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 181-182.

¹⁶⁰Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle*, 108-109.

Corps and Division Field Boards in the West

Though a formalized and well publicized means to receive a commission in the USCT, the regional boards were not the only commissioning authority for USCT officers. General Orders 143 and 144 did much to standardize the formation and commissioning process for USCT officers. However, they did not remove the authority Lincoln granted Major General Thomas to select and directly commission officers of black regiments.¹⁶¹ With that authority retained, Thomas toured the units in occupied Confederate territories and gave rousing speeches lauding the value of USCT regiments and the necessity for the best, brightest, and most dedicated soldiers to step forward and seek a commission as a USCT officer. Thomas ordered corps and division commanders in the West to recruit one regiment of black troops each and establish local field boards to examine candidates for USCT commissions.¹⁶²

Brigadier General John Beatty documented one of these field boards in his post-war memoirs. Although service on these boards was an additional duty for the members, most were regimental commanders and took their obligations quite seriously. Consequently, most field boards were just as prolific as the regional boards. During the month of August 1863, Beatty's board examined over 800 applicants for commission as USCT officers.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹*Official Records*, 3:3, 100-102.

¹⁶²William Wells Brown, *The Negro in the American Rebellion: His Heroism and Fidelity* (Miami, FL: Mnemosyne Publishing, Inc., 1969, previously published Boston: A.G. Brown and Company, 1880), 125.

¹⁶³John Beatty, *The Citizen-Soldier; or, Memoirs of a Volunteer* (Cincinnati, OH: Wilstach, Baldwin and Company, 1879), 319.

Beatty was initially skeptical that his board would receive qualified candidates for examination. During initial formation of the USCT, several commanders attempted to deny recommendations to worthy applicants to keep quality men under their command and provided recommendations to unworthy candidates to dump worthless men or those who were problems for their regiment. This practice stopped quickly when senior commanders such as Major General William Rosecrans held commanders fully responsible for the candidates they recommended and threatened dismissal for commanders who recommended unworthy or unqualified candidates.¹⁶⁴

Beatty quickly changed his mind regarding the possibility of finding qualified officers for USCT commissions. He was especially impressed with the quality of non-commissioned officers his board examined. Beatty commented ~~In~~ fact, we occasionally find a non-commissioned officer who is better qualified to command a regiment than nine-tenths of the colonels. I certainly know colonels who could not obtain a recommendation from this board for a second lieutenancy.”¹⁶⁵ As he himself had risen through the ranks from private to general officer, Beatty was well qualified to make that statement.

Some unworthy applicants did pass the boards, for whatever reason. However, unqualified officers who slipped through and passed were often later forced out of the USCT. Some were rejected during subsequent promotion boards, some were charged with misconduct, and many were dismissed as the result of an Inspector General’s report.

¹⁶⁴Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle*, 43.

¹⁶⁵Beatty, *The Citizen-Soldier*, 312.

Politically sensitive from the beginning, the USCT and its officers were always under wary scrutiny.¹⁶⁶

The Fort Jackson Mutiny

The Fort Jackson Mutiny stands out as a case study of what happened to USCT regiments when the officers did not receive proper scrutiny. The 4th Regiment, Corps d'Afrique mustered into service late in 1862, well before the Bureau of Colored Troops or USCT was formed. Likewise the majority of the officers selected by Ullmann did not arrive in Louisiana to take command until January 1863. In the absence of a board system or the scrutiny of a conscientious brigade commander, the officers initially appointed to command the Corps d'Afrique in general, and the 4th Regiment specifically, turned out to be unscrupulous and incompetent. Selected before Rosecrans' policy was put into effect, those officers selected to command the 4th Regiment were "trouble makers" whom other regiments had rejected.¹⁶⁷

The officers of the 4th Regiment were abusive and belligerent toward their men. The most hostile officer was Lieutenant Colonel Augustus Benedict. On 9 December 1863, the soldiers of the 4th Regiment had had enough. When Benedict had horsewhipped a soldier in front of his superior, Colonel Charles R. Drew,¹⁶⁸ nearly half

¹⁶⁶Martin W. Öfele, *German-Speaking Officers in the U.S. Colored Troops, 1863-1867* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2004), 123.

¹⁶⁷Fred Harvey Harrington, "The Fort Jackson Mutiny," *The Journal of Negro History* 27, no. 4 (October 1942): 421.

¹⁶⁸A sad accident of history is that the African-American physician, Charles R. Drew, who developed the method for separating plasma, shares the name of Colonel Drew.

the regiment rioted and attempted to murder Benedict. It took almost an hour for the members of the regiment not rioting to restore order. The allegations made following the mutiny prompted a commission of inquiry into the incident. The findings determined that the mutiny was not premeditated, but was the result of an intolerable command climate. Still, 13 soldiers were court martialed. Only four were acquitted, one received a commuted sentence, the remainder served from one to twenty years prison sentences (two would have been shot, but their sentences were suspended by Major General Banks in favor of imprisonment). Benedict attempted to resign. Instead he was court martialed for ~~inflicting~~ "inflicting cruel and unusual punishment, to the prejudice of good order and military discipline." Found guilty, his commission was revoked, and he was dismissed from the Army.¹⁶⁹

Despite Benedict's court martial, the 4th Regiment's officers continued to demonstrate vile behavior. One month after the mutiny, four captains and two lieutenants attempted to force their way into the rooms of a black laundress at the fort. All six were dismissed from the Army. By February 1864 the post commander, Brigadier General William Dwight, ordered Colonel Drew arrested on four counts of brutality.¹⁷⁰ Dwight recommended that the Army disband the 4th Regiment, dismiss all the officers and send the men to serve in other regiments. Dwight's recommendation to disband the regiment was ignored. The cruel irony for the regiment was that the soldiers fought with distinction

¹⁶⁹Harrington, —The Fort Jackson Mutiny," 422-425.

¹⁷⁰Hargrove, *Black Union Soldiers*, 112.

at the battle of Mobile, yet Drew served as their division commander, still in service, and promoted to Brigadier General.¹⁷¹

What About Black Officers?

As stated earlier, Butler allowed officers of the first two Louisiana Native Guards regiments to retain their positions. Banks later revoked those commissions and appointed white officers. This opposition to black officers was reinforced by Stanton's orders. In July 1863, Stanton restricted blacks from appearing before the USCT examination boards. Despite appeals from prominent citizens, as well as a few state governors and congressmen, Stanton held firm to his order for over a year. Finally, in February 1865, Stanton relented and permitted blacks to appear before the boards. He was persuaded by a petition signed by mayors, governors, congressmen, general officers, and even the Vice-President of the United States, Hannibal Hamlin, demanding the right for blacks to receive commissions. They alleged that the enthusiasm of black soldiers had waned due to their limited opportunity to advance.¹⁷²

Also in February 1865, Stanton ordered the commander of the Department of Kansas to raise an independent battery of artillery. The Independent Battery U.S. Colored Light Artillery was the first USCT unit commanded by black officers. Captain H. Ford Douglass, First Lieutenant William Mathews, and Second Lieutenant Patrick H. Minor passed the Cincinnati Board of Examiners that same month and took command.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹Harrington, —The Fort Jackson Mutiny,” 429-431.

¹⁷²Blassingame, —The Selection of Officers,” 10.

¹⁷³Ibid.

Despite the new policy, 99 percent of USCT officers were white. Seventy-five blacks received commissions during the Civil War. An estimated 7,122 officers served in the USCT. Ten of those 75 black officers served in Massachusetts regiments.¹⁷⁴ This may have been because of Andrews's personal relationship with Stanton, or the popularity the 54th and 55th Massachusetts Regiments enjoyed within the Union. To be sure, those units were viewed by the Bureau of Colored Troops itself as being ~~outside~~ "the federal system and under state jurisdiction."¹⁷⁵ A significant number of the remaining officers eventually served in the Corps d'Afrique. Those officers received particularly positive accolades for their bravery and were lauded as ~~cool~~ "cool and determined" under fire.¹⁷⁶

The reasons for not allowing blacks to receive commissions are almost as numerous as the reasons initially given for not allowing blacks to be soldiers. Just as the soldiers overcame those barriers, the best among them overcame the barriers to an officer's commission.

¹⁷⁴Binder, ~~Philadelphia's~~ "Free Military School," 282.

¹⁷⁵*Official Records*, 3:5, 661.

¹⁷⁶Blassingame, ~~The~~ "Selection of Officers," 11.

CHAPTER 4

LEADERSHIP AND THE ENDURING IMPACT OF USCT SERVICE

No man is a leader until his appointment is ratified in the minds and hearts of his men.

— Anonymous, *Military Review*

Men are naturally brave, and when the crisis comes, almost all men will fight well, if well commanded.

— Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Atlantic Monthly*

The Positive Impact of USCT Service on Black Veterans

Military service during a time of revolution, civil war, or any internecine conflict is an experience that often politicizes and radicalizes the participant. For USCT soldiers, the shift from slave to soldier was perhaps the most politically radical experience of any one social group during the Civil War. The outward transformation from slave to soldier was the most obvious change. Black troops often relished in flaunting their freedom. They rightly held the symbols of slavery in contempt and were bold in their insistence on equality and dignity in their interaction with others, especially with the Southern whites they encountered. Once the former slave completed his transformation to soldier he would never again allow himself to be put upon unjustly. More profound than the outward transformation was the transformation in black society. As the black soldier completed his transformation into a citizen, he imparted those feelings of equality and justice into the entire black community. The black soldier became the vanguard of citizenship and civil empowerment for the black community. During reconstruction, no

less than 41 delegates to state constitutional conventions, 60 state legislators, and four congressmen were veterans of the USCT.¹⁷⁷

For many USCT soldiers, their first positive interaction with whites was their service in the USCT. To the former slave, the Union Army, with its hierarchy and structure, was a rather egalitarian organization. For example, until the Militia Act of 1862 created an inequity in pay, there was little question among white officers that black soldiers would receive the same pay as white soldiers. Even while most white abolitionists were reluctant to push the issue, USCT officers continued to protest the injustice done to their men through unequal pay.¹⁷⁸ By 1864, the inequality of pay was largely settled, in no small part from the continual pressure from white USCT commanders. The impact of resolving the pay issue cannot be understated. With nearly two years of back-pay, plus the thrift forced on soldiers living in the field, USCT veterans were among the few blacks able to raise funds to build churches, orphanages, schools, and other civil institutions. Thus, black veterans enhanced the political, social, and financial independence of the black community by limiting the reliance on government charity and white philanthropy.¹⁷⁹

Since the majority of USCT soldiers were former slaves, most began their service as illiterates. This issue placed a considerable burden on the educated officers of black regiments. Partly to relieve themselves of performing the majority of clerical work, but

¹⁷⁷Foner, "Rights and the Constitution," 864-865.

¹⁷⁸Shannon, "Federal Government and the Negro Soldier," 581.

¹⁷⁹Donald R. Shaffer, *After the Glory: The Struggle of Black Civil War Veterans* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 32-33.

mostly out of a sense of moral responsibility, most USCT officers led earnest attempts to educate black soldiers. Likewise, these officers realized that education and soldiering went hand and hand. By smashing the fetters of ignorance they could more quickly mold recruits into confident men, competent soldiers, and conscientious citizens.

Many USCT commanders attempted, in various ways, to instill literacy and a civic education in their men. Higginson assigned the regimental chaplain the additional duty of forming a school to instruct soldiers in reading, writing, and mathematics in the evening. He also formed a regimental bank to encourage thrift and familiarize his men with the banking concept. Many other regiments followed the example of Higginson and appointed the chaplain, line officers, or other volunteers to form schools within the regiment. Besides reading and writing, most of these schools attempted to teach social and mental skills that soldiers would eventually need in civilian life.¹⁸⁰

Education within the USCT often extended beyond simple literacy. The officers of several regiments developed sophisticated educational programs that taught trade-crafts and civic responsibility. Lieutenant Colonel Charles Francis Adams of the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry (Colored) developed programs of instruction for his men in such diverse skills as bricklaying and blacksmithing. When the 25th Corps (Colored) was formed under his department in 1864, Major General Benjamin Butler ordered a formal school established within each of the Corps' 37 USCT regiments. The corps commander, Brigadier General Godfrey Weitzel, financed the schools and paid the teachers by implementing a tax on the corps' sutlers. Weitzel enforced Butler's policy and ensured

¹⁸⁰John W. Blassingame, "The Union Army as an Educational Institution for Negroes, 1862-1865," *The Journal of Negro Education* 34, no. 2 (Spring 1965): 154.

support for the schools by threatening any officer with dishonorable discharge who did not strive to improve his soldiers in drill, discipline, and education.¹⁸¹

Like Higginson, Butler established a bank within his corps for black soldiers. In order to make good citizens of their men, USCT officers continued to emphasize that freedom brought responsibilities as well as rights. To develop this sense of responsibility, USCT officers urged their soldiers to save enough money to buy land, a home, or business when they mustered out after the war. To this purpose, the men of the 25th Corps (Colored) deposited \$7,980 in Butler's bank by July 1865.¹⁸² In addition to this demonstrated sense of thrift, soldiers of the 64th and 65th USCI embraced their newfound sense of civic responsibility and love of education. Together, those regiments help found Lincoln University in Missouri when they donated nearly \$6,400¹⁸³ of their pay in June 1866 toward its establishment.¹⁸⁴

The effort to educate USCT soldiers was the final stage in the transformation from slave to citizen. Improvement in education planted the seeds of independence, thrift, civic mindedness, and political awareness.¹⁸⁵ Service in the USCT provided a visible and irrefutable weapon against the prejudice of whites for all black Americans. The inner

¹⁸¹Ibid., 156-157.

¹⁸²Ibid., 157.

¹⁸³This number and the \$7,980 deposited in the 25th Corps' bank is particularly impressive considering the monthly pay of a USCT private (once they received equal pay) was only \$13 per month.

¹⁸⁴Shaffer, *After the Glory*, 33.

¹⁸⁵Blassingame, "The Union Army as an Educational Institution," 159.

transformation provided by their service and the education they received was a less visible yet even more powerful weapon that USCT veterans used to arm themselves against prejudice and discrimination. Education provided black USCT veterans with the tools necessary to become leaders in their own right. With knowledge and confidence they worked to uplift all black Americans. Many USCT veterans went on to hold political office and became champions of early civil rights movements.¹⁸⁶

The Psychological Impact of USCT Service

Though medical records from the 19th century are unreliable at best, anecdotal and statistical evidence seems to indicate that USCT veterans did well in their adjustment to civilian life. Despite the trauma of war, most USCT soldiers saw their horizons broadened by service. They looked forward to experiencing life as free men. According to records, black USCT veterans divorced, committed suicide, encountered mental problems, and experienced symptoms of post-traumatic stress at a rate lower than that of other veterans. One explanation given for this positive trend is the strong bonds that developed among black USCT veterans as a result of the training they received in their service. In combat, they were lauded for maintaining tight, disciplined formations. They maintained close friendships and supported each other physically, socially, and emotionally. This support served to reduce the sense of isolation and stave off the corrosive effects of combat stress.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle*, 249-250; Shaffer, *After the Glory*, 69.

¹⁸⁷Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle*, 237-238.

Another possible reason for the relatively low incidence of personal difficulty in adjusting to civilian life was the sense of support black USCT veterans received from the black community. The burgeoning free black community looked to their veterans as liberators. These former soldiers were often asked to be leaders within the black community and were honored for their service. They stood as a bulwark against hostile whites who attempted to strip away the recently won freedoms. Their initial enthusiasm and stalwartness was contagious among the new communities of free blacks. Perhaps it was that enthusiasm and support that shielded black USCT veterans from the worst effects of post-traumatic stress.¹⁸⁸

In contrast to the relatively successful transition of black USCT veterans to civilian life, white USCT officers seemed to experience considerable difficulty in their transition from military service. The rate of divorce was four to five times that of other white veterans. Suicide, alcoholism, and drug abuse (mostly in the form of opium addiction) were particularly high.¹⁸⁹

One possible explanation for the higher rate of adjustment disorders among white USCT officers compared to black soldiers could be the lack of a support network during and following their service. Though they were enthusiastic volunteers and considered themselves “elite” and a select few, white USCT officers were virtual pariahs among the Union officer corps. They were isolated from their own men by a code of honor that demanded they present a brave and unflappable countenance. They were not allowed to

¹⁸⁸Berlin, *Freedom*, 770.

¹⁸⁹Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle*, 238.

show fear or uncertainty for fear that their ~~weakness~~” would infect their men. Their sense of isolation from peers, subordinates, and superiors, must have been enormous.¹⁹⁰

Added to these stressors was the threat of death at the hands of the enemy if captured. Most USCT officers truly considered themselves fighting under a ~~black~~ flag,” with no mercy given or expected. This status was demonstrated emphatically after the battle of Milliken’s Bend, when Confederate soldiers hanged USCT prisoners, black and white alike. It was also confirmed at the Fort Pillow massacre, where black soldiers and their officers were executed on the spot.¹⁹¹ Captain John McMurry of the 6th USCI gave a description of his own bout with untreated post-traumatic stress following his regiment’s most bloody day of combat.

Less than a year before I left Camp William Penn . . . with over ninety men in my company, and two officers besides myself. Now I had just three enlisted men present for duty. Both officers of my company were in hospital, one sick and the other wounded. . . . After eating some supper I began to have a strange, unusual feeling, a feeling of great oppression. I experienced a tingling, prickly sensation, as though a thousand little needles were jaggging my flesh. The air seemed oppressive, and I breathed with difficulty. So I went out to get relief, and spent a good portion of the night walking round and round the little building. After a while I became wild, almost crazy, and had to be looked after by those near me. . . . What ailed me that night of September 29, 1864, I did not know at the time. But I found it out afterward, and have realized it many times since. The strain on me was so great through the day, that when the excitement passed over and quiet came, my nervous organization broke down temporarily . . . I have suffered more or less every year of my life since from that day’s experience.¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰Ibid., 242.

¹⁹¹Wilson, *The Black Phalanx*, 315-318.

¹⁹²James M. Paradis, *Strike the Blow For Freedom: The 6th United States Colored Infantry in the Civil War* (Shippensburg, PA: White Mane Books, 1998), 96.

For those USCT officers and soldiers who were taken prisoner, their fate may have been little better than death. Black prisoners of war were treated little better than animals in Confederate prison camps and were even shunned by white Union prisoners of war. The white USCT officers fared no better, and (at least at Andersonville Prison) were segregated with their men. Denied medical treatment or rudimentary shelter, and denied proper rations, the odds of a USCT soldier, black or white, surviving as a prisoner of war were slim.¹⁹³

Regardless of their emotional difficulties in adjusting to civilian life, many white USCT officers managed to transition from military service into successful professional careers. The number of USCT officers who went on to become doctors, lawyers, and clergymen was nearly twice that of their non-USCT counterparts. Many USCT officers attributed their post war success to their training received as a result of USCT service. One officer who graduated from the Free Military School directly attributed the quality and level of knowledge he had gained there with enabling him to become a lawyer following the war. Some of the success in civilian careers can be attributed to the opportunities available in the more industrialized post-war United States. Perhaps more than anything, the USCT had taught its officers how to manage men, often under the most difficult of circumstances.¹⁹⁴

Though there were negative effects of USCT service, the positive impact far outweighed any negative effects. The officers of the USCT were given a mandate to

¹⁹³Thomas J. Ward, Jr., "Enemy Combatants: Black Soldiers in Confederate Prisons," *Army History* no. 78 (Winter 2011): 39.

¹⁹⁴Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle*, 244.

provide their men with the best leadership possible. They believed that part of that their mandate included preparing their soldiers for life after the war. This view of leadership and application of moral responsibility to care for the soldier holistically helped arm black USCT veterans with the knowledge and spirit to achieve success as free citizens of the United States. The unfortunate cost of being a confident and fearless paragon of authority left the white officer leadership of the USCT emotionally isolated and particularly vulnerable to the toxic and corrosive effects of combat stress. However, perhaps this is the burden of any leader who seeks to improve the members of his organization, while at the same time accomplishing the mission, no matter the difficulty or price.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

You owe it to yourself and your race to rise from your social debasement and take your place among the soldiers of your country, a man among them. . . . He who fights and battle of America may claim America as his own country—and have that claim respected. Thus in defending your country now against rebels and traitors you are defending your own liberty, honor, manhood and self-respect.

— Frederick Douglass, *Douglass' Monthly*, April 1863

Conclusions

The War Department authorized the USCT out of both a strategic military necessity and as an attempt to gain control of the *ad hoc* process of arming black soldiers. From the beginning of the Civil War, the abolitionist movement placed incessant pressure on the Union government to allow blacks to serve as soldiers. This was especially true among the “emancipationist” faction of the abolition movement, which believed arming blacks would expedite the end of the war. Abolitionist groups were able to find military leaders and political leaders who also considered the freedom of slaves as a military necessity. The military necessity argument was used by adaptable abolitionist commanders to justify forming black regiments. From the end of 1862 to the spring of 1863, while Congress debated the issue of creating black regiments, abolitionist minded commanders created their own regiments through *ad hoc* authorizations and permissions from either President Abraham Lincoln or Secretary of War Edwin Stanton. The first regiments validated the ability of blacks to serve as soldiers. By creating General Order Number 143, the War Department federalized and regulated the entire process of recruiting, manning, organizing, and selecting leadership for the newly formed USCT.

The federalized process provided a unique opportunity for the War Department to scrutinize and screen USCT officers.

The majority of candidates who received commissions in the USCT were dedicated and conscientious leaders as a result of the scrutiny they underwent at the hands of the Bureau of Colored Troops. Officers were appointed to command USCT regiments following a logical and original merit-based program of selection and promotion. They were screened for character, ability, and dedication. Candidates that passed the Board of Examiners proved their character, merit, and competence to lead. Many received additional, valuable education through semi-formal support systems of schooling that armed them with a unique quality education in military art and science.

The USCT recruited soldiers and officers from every geographical area. This expanded the pool of candidates and nearly guaranteed that officers from multiple regions would serve in the same regiment. This provided the largest possible pool of the best men available to serve. As a result, state pride and regional parochialism seldom acted as a motivator for USCT officers. Regardless of their individual reasons for appearing before the Board of Examiners, those who received commissions in the USCT felt satisfaction in their qualifications. Those officers who passed the difficult requirements to serve in the USCT proved to be some of the most dedicated and able leaders the Union could provide.

Many USCT officers considered it their moral duty to assist their men in the transformation not only into soldiers, but free men and citizens of the United States. These officers understood that the soldiers who were former slaves had learned to follow orders out of fear and compulsion. The most dedicated leaders were able to develop these men into soldiers that followed out of desire and commitment to service. They were able

to train men who followed commands because it was their duty, and not out of fear or servility. This training, military discipline, and service in the name of liberty provided many of the men of the USCT the self-respect slavery had stolen. By restoring their soldiers' dignity as men, the officers of the USCT enabled their soldiers to take their place as free men and citizens of the Republic.

Though prejudice and inequity remained following the Civil War, the consequence of the successful formation and employment of the USCT was that nearly one-fifth of all adult black males of military age (15 to 48) participated in the Civil War as soldiers. Their successful service helped shatter the psychological fetters of inferiority and changed the legal and civil role of blacks in America forever. Honorable service in the Union Army and substantial assistance to Union victory while serving in the USCT reinforced blacks' justifiable moral claim to equal rights as citizens of the United States of America.¹⁹⁵

Recommendations

This study briefly covered many topics that deserve further inquiry. The education of black soldiers seemed to presage modern attempts to make education available to all soldiers. What are the parallels and similarities between those efforts and subsequent efforts to raise the education of soldiers? How successful were those programs and what impact did they have on the quality of life of veterans? The subject of the history of civil education to enlisted soldiers seems to be ripe for research.

¹⁹⁵Foner, "Rights and the Constitution," 864-865.

One subject only briefly mentioned is the Veteran Reserve Corps (originally the Invalid Corps). The Veteran Reserve Corps was a robust organization on par with the USCT in size and social significance, but there is little research available about this organization. Its function was similar to the United States Army Warrior Transition Command established following Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom. Under the Veteran Reserve Corps, Union Army veterans who were unable to serve in combat could remain in uniform and work in administrative and support jobs for the Army. An examination of how that organization impacted disabled soldiers, veteran issues, and quality of life for veterans would be valuable.

A study of the continued relationship between both white and black veterans following the Civil War would be beneficial. Donald R. Shaffer's *After the Glory: The Struggle of Black Civil War Veteran* is one of the few books on the subject. What was the relationship between non-USCT veterans and USCT veterans? Was there any disparity in the treatment of veterans among each other? Where USCT veterans, black and white, viewed differently by civilians? The entire realm of race and veterans' issues are open for investigation.

APPENDIX A

MAJOR GENERAL FREMONT'S EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION

—All persons who shall be taken with arms in their hands within these lines shall be tried by court martial, and, if found guilty, will be shot. The property, real and personal, of all persons in the State of Missouri, who shall take up arms against the United States, or who shall be directly proven to have taken active part with their enemies in the field, is declared to be confiscated to the public use, and their slaves, if any they have, are hereby declared free men.”

Source: William Wells Brown, *The Negro in the American Rebellion: His Heroism and Fidelity* (Miami, FL: Mnemosyne Publishing, Inc., 1969, previously published Boston: A.G. Brown and Company, 1880), 70.

APPENDIX B

TEXT OF GENERAL ORDER NUMBER 143

GENERAL ORDERS,

No. 143

WAR DEPARTMENT,

ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE,

Washington, May 22, 1863.

I -- A Bureau is established in the Adjutant General's Office for the record of all matters relating to the organization of Colored Troops, An officer ,will be assigned to the charge of the Bureau, with such number of clerks as may be designated by the Adjutant General.

II -- Three or more field officers will be detailed as Inspectors to supervise the organization of colored troops at such points as may be indicated by the War Department in the Northern and Western States.

III -- Boards will be convened at such posts as may be decided upon by the War Department to examine applicants for commissions to command colored troops, who, on Application to the Adjutant General, may receive authority to present themselves to the board for examination.

IV -- No persons shall be allowed to recruit for colored troops except specially authorized by the War Department; and no such authority will be given to persons who have not been examined and passed by a board; nor will such authority be given any one person to raise more than one regiment.

V -- The reports of Boards will specify the grade of commission for which each candidate is fit, and authority to recruit will be given in accordance. Commissions will be issued

from the Adjutant General's Office when the prescribed number of men is ready for muster into service.

VI -- Colored troops may be accepted by companies, to be afterward consolidated in battalions and regiments by the Adjutant General. The regiments will be numbered seriatim, in the order in which they are raised, the numbers to be determined by the Adjutant General. They will be designated: ——Regiment of U. S. Colored Troops.”

VII -- Recruiting stations and depots will be established by the Adjutant General as circumstances shall require, and officers will be detailed to muster and inspect the troops.

VIII -- The non-commissioned officers of colored troops may be selected and appointed from the best men of their number in the usual mode of appointing non-commissioned officers. Meritorious commissioned officers will be entitled to promotion to higher rank if they prove themselves equal to it.

IX -- All personal applications for appointments in colored regiments, or for information concerning them, must be made to the Chief of the Bureau; all written communications should be addressed to the Chief of the Bureau, to the care of the Adjutant General,

BY ORDER OF THE SECRETARY OF WAR:

E. D. TOWNSEND,

Assistant Adjutant General.

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